

ANC

MANHUNT

DETECTIVE STORY MONTHLY

MAY
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EVERY
STORY
NEW!

CIGARETTE GIRL

By

James
M. Cain

CRAIG RICE • JOHN ROSS MACDONALD • HAROLD Q. MASUR
WILLIAM P. MCGIVERN • STEVE FRAZEE • AND OTHERS

MANHUNT

MAY

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JOHN McCLOUD *Editor* E. A. TULMAN, *Managing Editor*
 CHAS. W. ADAMS *Art Director* R. E. DECKER, *Business Manager*

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The Guilty Ones

A Lew Archer novelette

BY JOHN ROSS MACDONALD

The woman could have supplied most of the answers in the case, but she wasn't talking when Archer found her. She lay nude and dead on the floor of the old deserted house.

HE ENTERED my doorway sideways, a man in a very conservative dark grey suit, carrying a dark grey Homburg in his hand. Across the bald top of his head, long black strands of hair were brushed demurely. His face was long and dark. Only his tie had color: it lay on his chest like a slumbering purple passion.

His sharp black gaze darted around my office, then back into the corridor. Though his face was composed, he was as taut as a wire. I could practically hear him hum.

I said: "What's the trouble? Somebody following you?"

"Certainly not." His tone was so icy it clinked.

I had my coat off and my shirt unbuttoned. It was a hot spring morning. He looked at me in a certain way that reminded me of school. "Might you be Archer?"

"It's a reasonable hypothesis. Name's on the door."

"I can read, thank you."

"Congratulations, but this is no talent agency."

Without moving his feet, he seemed to jump backward. He clutched his blue chin between thumb and forefinger and gave me a long sad hostile stare. Then he shrugged awkwardly, as if there was no help for it.

"Come in," I said. "Close it behind you. Don't mind me; I get snappy in the springtime."

He closed the door violently, almost breaking the expensive one-way glass panel. "I'm sorry. I'm under quite a strain."

"You're in trouble, then."

"Not I. My sister." His mouth snapped like a trap, and he looked at me some more. I assumed an air of bored discretion garnished with a sprig of innocence.

But all I felt was the boredom. "Your sister," I reminded him after a while. "Did she do something, or get something done to her?"

A narrow edge of white teeth showed in a fussy little smile. "Both, I fear. We maintain a school for girls in — the middle west. I can't emphasize too much the utter importance of keeping this matter profoundly secret."

"You're doing your part. Sit down, Mr. —"

He produced a card from a thin black wallet and hesitated with it in his hand.

"Don't tell me," I said. "Let me guess. Does it begin with a consonant or a vowel?"

He sat down with great caution, as if the chair had electrodes, and handed me his card. J. Reginald Harlan, M.A.

"Your sister is in a spot, Mr. Harlan. You run a girls' school —"

"She's headmistress. I'm registrar and bursar."

"— so you're vulnerable to scandal. Is it sexual trouble she's in?"

"You're quite acute."

"Some of my best friends are

sisters. Is she older or younger than you?"

"She's considerably younger. You might say I've been *in loco parentis* to her since Father died. Maude's still in her early twenties." He didn't mention his own age. He was the kind who would keep it a secret.

"And she ran away with a man?"

"A man, yes." He heaved a spinsterly sigh. "How she could have become infatuated with that dreadful creature — I fail to understand it! Maude's always been such a sensible girl, mature for her age, a great scholar. That's what makes this whole affair so incredible. And disgusting. For a woman of her class, in her position, with a hundred young minds in her charge, suddenly to run mad over a man!" A faint, attractive doubt softened his eyes for a moment. He was wondering if some long overdue lightning might blast and illuminate him. "I'd always supposed the teens were the dangerous age. Perhaps after all it can happen at *any* age." One hand crawled up his chest like a thin white crab and fondled the purple tie.

"Tell me about him," I said.

He told me that the man was a painter named Leonard Clark. At least the lecture bureau that sent him to the Harlan School claimed that he was a painter. Clark regarded himself as a universal genius, in his cups. Yes, he drank a good deal. In spite of that, he spoke well. His lectures on modern art were the hit

of the spring semester. Some of the girls actually begged him for snippets of his beard. . . . Yes, he wore a beard, and a different-colored beret for every occasion. On Friday, when he arrived, he wore a white beret. On Saturday at the intramural hockey game, he wore a bright red one. On Sunday, when he and Maude slipped away from chapel to go for a long walk in the country, he wore a dark blue one. On Monday, the day he left, his headgear was a brash and shameless orange. Maude left with him.

"I followed them to the airport," Harlan said. "I remonstrated and pleaded with her. She was adamant. The school meant nothing to her, suddenly. *I* meant nothing to her. The memory of our father, who founded the school, meant nothing. Over a single weekend, that devil of a Clark had bewitched her. She said that marriage was all she'd ever wanted, and she was going to have it. Her entire system of values has been subverted!" He gave a cruel yank to the purple tie, and subsided.

"Maybe she's in love. Hell, maybe he's loveable."

"He's a lewd rascal. I know a lewd rascal when I see one. He's a sponge and a womanizer and a drinker."

I looked at my liquor cabinet. It was closed.

"Do they intend to get married?"

"It's already done. They were married before they left. The situation is desperate. Mr. Archer. You

don't know my sister. She is a fine, proud woman, a woman of sensibility. This Clark will pulverize her spirit, brutalize her body, waste her money —"

"Money?"

"Of course money. Why else did he marry her? She exhausted our joint checking account the day she went away. That's nearly a thousand dollars gone already, and there's nothing to prevent her from drawing on our capital. She might even sell the school."

"She owns it?"

"Father left it to her. I — my administrative ability was a little slow in developing. Poor father didn't live to see me mature." He coughed. "The buildings alone are worth nearly two hundred thousand; the added value of our prestige is incalculable."

Harlan paused in a listening attitude. No doubt he could hear the unholy gurgle of money going down the drain. I put on my coat.

"You want them traced, is that it?"

"Oh, I know where they are. They've settled in his apartment in Westwood. I was out there last night, but Clark wouldn't let me see her. He had the gall to tell me that I had no business meddling in Maude's affairs. He even threatened me with physical violence. What do you think of that?"

I thought that Clark was doing the natural thing. I didn't say it, though. Harlan was hellbent for

trouble, and if I strung along I might help to minimize it:

"And that's where I come in?"

"If you will, I deplore and detest violence of any kind. On the other hand, I intend to see my sister today if it's the last thing I ever do."

We had a short talk about money. Harlan endorsed a twenty-dollar travellers' check for me, and we went downstairs to my car. It wasn't far to Westwood, as distances go in Los Angeles. Clark's apartment was a studio built over an attached garage. A flight of concrete steps slanted up the outside wall to the studio door. I knocked.

"Imagine Maude being reduced to this," Harlan said at my elbow. "My sister is a woman of exquisite refinement."

"Uh-huh." I knocked again. There was no answer.

"Pick the lock," in an urgent whisper. "They're in there lying low, I'm sure of it. You must have skeleton keys?"

"I also have a license to lose."

Harlan reached past me and hammered on the door. His seal-ringed knuckle made little dents in the paint.

A man's voice said behind and below us: "Looking for someone?"

I laid a hand on Harlan's convulsive arm. A heavy-bodied man with unkempt hair was leaning on the railing at the foot of the stairs. "Clark's not here, if he's the one you want."

We went down. The man's face

was disorganized by alcohol, and marked by grief. It had never launched any ships. Weak and over-fleshed, with a raw defenseless mouth, it drooped abjectly on its bones. So did his body. He was a soft-boiled egg without a shell.

"Where did Clark go?"

"I have no idea." He lifted the burden of his shoulders, and dropped it. "He drove away early this morning before I woke up. He cleaned out everything in the studio that belonged to him. Which, apart from his paintings, didn't amount to much."

"You're his landlord?"

He nodded. "Clark's been away, though, on a lecture tour in the east. He just got back yesterday. Now it looks as if he's gone for good."

"You must be Mr. Dolphine," Harlan said. "I spoke to your wife last evening. A charming girl indeed."

Dolphine leaned his back against the closed door of the garage, and looked at Harlan. His eyes were narrow and empty between puffed eyelids. "Who, may I ask, are *you*?"

Harlan opened his mouth to speak, glanced at me, and coughed against the back of his hand.

"Mr. Harlan sold Mrs. Clark a car," I said. "She's a little behind on her payments."

Harlan scowled in my direction, but Dolphine didn't notice:

"Clark really is married, eh?"

"Didn't you see his wife?"

"Sure, I saw her. I was outside

here when they got in from the airport yesterday morning. He introduced her to me, but I had my doubts."

"About what?"

"About her being his wife." He noticed Harlan's stricken look, and said: "I mean, Clark isn't the marrying kind. He's kind of a louse where women are concerned. But I guess they're married if you say so."

"Of course they're married," Harlan said dogmatically. "Isn't marriage a normal custom in Los Angeles? If only to support the divorce rate —"

I silenced him with a stiff look. As a Los Angeles car dealer, Harlan wasn't very convincing. "What about her car?"

"She didn't have one. They got here in a taxi, and Clark said they flew out from Cleveland. The only car between them was his old Buick, and it's gone. They must have left in it."

I got a description of the Buick. a blue prewar sedan on its second hundred thousand, but Dolphine didn't know the license number. Nor had Clark left a forwarding address.

"Do you know any friends of his?"

"I do not. I lead a very quiet life myself."

"Your wife might be able to help us," Harlan said. "She seemed to know Clark quite well."

Dolphine's grey head turned. "When were you talking to Stella?"

"Last night, about nine o'clock. Clark wouldn't let me in to see my — to see Mrs. Clark. I took the liberty of ringing your doorbell."

"Why?"

"I hardly know. I acted on impulse. Your wife didn't seem to mind."

"She didn't eh? What did you talk about?"

"About your tenant, naturally. I had the impression that she was a friend of his. She seemed interested in the fact of his marriage, though she was just as incredulous as you, at first."

"But you convinced her, huh?" Under the high sun, Dolphine's face was blotched white, as dead as the moon.

"I suppose I did."

"And you found her charming, huh?" His heavy tousled head came forward, dragging the shoulders after it.

The situation was turning ugly, but Harlan was impervious to it. "Why yes, you have a very lovely wife, Mr. Dolphine. Do you think we might ask her a few questions, if she's at home this morning, and not too busy —?"

Dolphine took Harlan by the throat. I knocked his hands up and away before they could do any damage. He staggered back against the garage door and stood shuddering, his arms outstretched in the attitude of crucifixion.

"By heaven," Harlan said. "I'll sue you for assault and battery."

"I'm sorry." Dolphine's mouth was trembling, as if he had given himself a terrible scare. An asthmatic wheeze twanged like a loose guitar string in the back passages of his head. "I'm not a well man. This excitement —" His hands came together, operatically clutching at his chest.

"Take it easy, Mr. Dolphine. Harlan didn't mean anything against your wife. We're simply trying to repossess an automobile, and we'll be grateful for any cooperation —"

"You're a pair of liars," he wheezed. "Who are you, anyway? What do you want?"

"Nothing at all from you. If we could ask your wife a couple of questions —"

"You can't."

"Why not?"

"She isn't here."

"Where is she?"

His mouth was working. He put one hand up to hold it still, and said between the fingers: "Stella's left me."

Harlan pushed forward past me. "Don't you have any notion where she's gone?"

"No. I don't. Are you from the police?"

"I'm a private detective," I said.

Dolphine wheezed waspishly: "Ask Leonard Clark where she is, then. He can tell you."

He turned his back on us and walked uncertainly to the front door of his house.

Harlan started after him.

I held him. "Drop it for now. We've stirred up enough trouble. The guy's broken up."

The front door slammed, and a bolt clicked home. Harlan struggled in my grip. "He knows more than he's saying."

"Everybody does, except maybe you. You talk ahead of yourself."

"How dare you?" His hat fell off, and his meager hair came unstuck and fell over his ears. "Take your hands off me, do you hear?"

I left him wiping his hat with a handkerchief and got into my car, not caring whether he came along or not. He ran after me and climbed in:

"The least you can do for the money I paid you is drop me at my hotel. The cab fares are scandalous here."

"Worse than Cleveland?"

No answer. He sulked while I drove back to Sunset.

"Which way?" I asked him at the intersection.

"I'm staying at the Oceano Hotel, in Santa Monica. If you're going to do nothing further to find my sister, I expect a rebate of at least fifty percent."

I couldn't help laughing at him. "You'll get paid in services, Harlan. I'll spend the rest of the day on it, but I can't promise anything. This town was built for missing persons to lose themselves in."

"How do I know you'll spend the day on it?"

I wanted to ask him who had

stolen his rattle in infancy. Instead I said: "Oh, shut up."

He sulked the rest of the way. I let him out at the curb without a word. On the light-washed ocean front, against the pale pink backdrop of the hotel, he looked like a displaced shadow from a dark dream. Not my dream, I congratulated myself.

II

Prematurely. Within an hour he telephoned my office. In the meantime, I'd been in touch with a friend at the art gallery who knew Leonard Clark. Clark was a genuine painter, financially unsuccessful like most living artists, who eked out his rare commissions by teaching and lecturing. He'd had a year in France in the old expatriate days, and never got over it. That is, he drank too much, lived foolishly in the Bohemian manner, and treated women badly. The women seemed to like it. My informant couldn't or wouldn't name any names.

Harlan's voice was high with excitement: "I've heard from him, and my fears were justified. It's money he wants."

"Clark, you mean?"

"Yes. He telephoned me a few minutes ago. I've been trying to get in touch with you. He's coming here."

"When?"

"At twelve noon. I'm to meet him in the lobby."

"Good. I'll try to get there before he does."

The electric clock on the wall of the desk-clerk's alcove said nineteen minutes to twelve when I walked in. Harlan was sitting stiffly on a red plastic settee. He rose to meet me with a tentative smile:

"I didn't mean to be unpleasant this morning. I'm afraid we Harlans have rather emotional natures."

"Forget it. How much money does he want?"

"Five thousand dollars. He says he's bringing Maude's check for that amount. I'm to expedite payment by telephoning our bank in Cleveland. It amounts to his asking me to cash the check."

"Did you talk to your sister?"

"No. He had a long involved explanation about Maude. According to him, she's not well enough to leave the house, and there's no telephone where they're staying. I tell you he means her no good, if she's still alive —"

"Don't jump to conclusions. Handle him carefully. Accept what he says."

"You don't mean I should cash the check?" Harlan spoke with great feeling — five thousand dollars' worth.

"It's your sister's money, isn't it? Maybe she needs it."

"How could she? She took a thousand dollars with her on Monday. She couldn't spend all that in less than two days, unless the man is bleeding her."

"It may not be as bad as you think. I've made some inquiries. He's known locally as a painter."

"That's scarcely a recommendation," Harlan said darkly.

"We'll see. Tell him he'll have to come back for the cash. I'll wait outside and tail him when he comes out. You sit tight. I'll get in touch with you when I find out where they're holed up."

Leonard Clark had the virtue of punctuality, at least. At one minute to twelve, an old Buick sedan pulled up at the curb a hundred feet south of the hotel entrance. It had come from the direction of downtown Santa Monica. The man who got out was unmistakably the one I was looking for. Red-headed, blue-bearded, and well over six feet tall, he was as conspicuous as a circus wagon.

I was parked across the wide boulevard, facing south. As soon as he entered the hotel, I U-turned and parked a few cars behind the Buick. Its faded blue paint was almost hidden under a thick coat of road grime and dust.

I left my car for a closer look at it. The registration on the steering post showed Leonard Clark's name, and the address in Westwood. The back seat was piled with stretched canvases, some of which were framed. To my unprofessional eye, the top one looked professional. There was a long object wrapped in brown paper on the floor. It had the shape of a spade.

Back in my own car, I made a note of the license number and waited. The blue glare from the sea bothered my eyes. I put on a pair of dark glasses. A few minutes later I removed my coat. Then Clark appeared on the sidewalk, swaggering towards me. The face above the beard had a look of naive excitement. He was one of those middle-aged men who still have a boy's reactions: chronological age about forty, emotional age about twelve. The beard had a purpose.

It got into the Buick, closely followed by its owner, and headed north. I trailed it through increasing traffic at a variable distance. Clark drove with artistic abandon, burning rubber at the Sunset stoplight. Six or eight miles north of it he turned off the highway, tires screeching again. I braked hard and took the turn onto gravel slowly.

The gravel road slanted steeply up a hillside. The Buick disappeared over the rim. I ate my way through its dust to the top and saw it a quarter-mile ahead, going fast. The road wound down into a small closed valley where a few ranch-houses stood in cultivated fields. A tractor clung like a slow orange beetle to the far hillside. The air between was so still that the Buick's dust hung like a colloid over the road. I ate another couple of miles of it, by way of lunch.

Beyond the third and last ranch-house, a County sign announced: *This is not a through road.* The

Buick was far ahead by now, spinning into the defile between two slopes at the inner end of the valley. It spun out of sight. The road got worse, became a single dirt track rutted and eroded by the rains of many springs. At its narrowest point an old landslide almost blocked it.

I was so taken up with the road that I passed the house before I noticed it. It stood far back, masked by eucalyptus. I caught a glimpse of the Buick, standing empty, through the trees; and I kept on going. When I was out of sight of the house I turned my car and left it with the doors locked.

I climbed through yellow mustard and purple lupine to a point from which I could look down on the house. It was a ruin. Its cracked stucco walls leaned crazily. Part of the tile roof had caved in. I guessed that it had been abandoned when water undermined its foundations. Rank geraniums rioted in the front yard, and wild oats stood fender-high around the Buick.

In the back yard, close against the wall of the house, Clark was digging a hole. The bright iron of his spade flashed now and then in the sun. I moved down the slope towards him. The hole was about six feet long by two feet wide. Clark's head, when he paused to rest, cast a jut-jawed shadow at the foot of the stucco wall.

I sat down with the yellow mustard up to my eyes, and watched him work. After a while he took his

shirt off. He had heavy white shoulders peppered with reddish brown freckles. The metal of his spade was losing its brightness. In an hour the hole was approximately four feet deep. Clark's red hair was dark with sweat, and his arms were running with it. He stuck the spade into the pile of adobe he had dug, and went into the house.

I started down the hillside. A hen pheasant whirred up from under my feet. In the glazed stillness, its wings made a noise like a jato takeoff. I watched the house but there was no response, no face at the broken windows. I stepped over the sagging wire fence and crossed the back yard.

The door hung open on what had been a back kitchen. Its floor was littered with broken plaster which crunched under my feet. Through the bare ribs of the ceiling daylight gleamed. The silence in the house was finely stitched with a tiny tumult of insects. I thought I could hear the murmur of voices somewhere; then the sound of heavy footsteps moved towards me through the house.

I had my revolver ready. Clark came through the inner doorway, carrying a burlap bundle upright in his arms. His head was craned awkwardly sideways, watching his feet, and he failed to see me until I spoke:

"Hold it, gravedigger."

His head came up, eyes wide and blue in the red sweat-streaked face.

His reaction was incredibly quick and strong. Without losing a step he came forward, thrusting his bundle out at arm's length into my face. I fired as I went down backwards with the burlap thing on top of me. I pushed it off. It was heavy and stiff like refrigerated meat. One of Clark's heels stamped down on my gun hand, the other came into my face. The daylight in the ceiling glimmered redly and died.

III

When my eyes blinked open, sunlight stabbed into them from the open door. One of my arms was numb, pinned under the thing in the burlap shroud. I disengaged myself from its embrace and sat up against the wall. The rumor of insects sounded in my head like small arms fire between the heavy artillery of my pulse. I sat poised for a while between consciousness and unconsciousness. Then my vision cleared. I dabbed at my swollen face with my usable hand.

My revolver lay on the floor. I picked it up and spun the cylinder: its chambers had been emptied. Still sitting, I dragged the burlap bundle towards me and untied the twine that held its wrapping in place. Peeling the burlap down with a shaky hand, I saw a lock of wavy black hair stiff with blood.

I stood up and unwrapped the body completely. It was the body of a young woman who had been

beautiful. Her beauty was marred by a depressed contusion which cut slantwise like a groove across the left temple. Bending close, I could also see a pair of purplish ovals on the front of her throat. Thumb-prints.

She wore no clothes. Her skin shone like ivory in the light from the doorway. I covered her with the burlap. Then I noticed that my wallet was lying open on the floor. Nothing seemed to be missing from it, except the travellers' check that Harlan had endorsed to me that morning.

I went through the house. It was a strange place for a honeymoon, even for a honeymoon that ended in murder. There were no lights, and no furniture, with the exception of an old canvas cot in what had been the living room. This room had a fairly weatherproof ceiling, and was clearly the one that Clark and his wife had occupied. There were traces of a recent fire in the fireplace: burned fragments of eucalyptus bark and a few scraps of scorched cloth. The ashes were not quite cold.

I crossed the room to the cot, noticing the marks of a woman's heels in the dust on the floor. In the dust beside the cot someone had written three words in long sloping script. *Ora pro nobis*. The meaning of the phrase came back to me across twenty years or more. *Ora pro nobis*. *Pray for us. Now and in the hour of our death.* . . .

For a minute I felt as insubstantial as a ghost lost in time. The dead woman and the living words were realer than I was. The actual world was a house with its roof falling in, dissolved so thin you could see the sunlight through it.

When I heard the car noise outside, I didn't believe my ears. I went to the front door, which stood open. A new tan Studebaker was toiling up the overgrown driveway under the eucalyptus trees. It stopped where the Buick had been, and Harlan got out.

I stood back behind the door and watched him through the crack. He approached cautiously, his black birdlike glance shifting from one side to the other. When his foot was on the lintel, I showed myself and the empty gun in my hand. He froze in midstride, with a rigor that matched the dead woman's.

"For heaven's sake, put that gun down. You gave me a dreadful start."

"Before I put it down, I want to know how you got here. Have you been talking to Clark?"

"I saw him at noon, you know that. He told me about this place. I didn't get out on the street in time to intercept you. Now put the gun away, there's a good fellow. What on earth happened to your face?"

"I'll tell you in a minute. I don't understand yet why you're here." But I dropped the gun in my pocket.

"Wasn't that the plan, that I

should join you here? I rented a car and got here as soon as I could. It took me a long time to find this place. And no wonder. It's positively Godforsaken." His eyes darkened, and cleared. "Are they inside?"

"One of them is."

"My sister?" His hand grasped my arm. The long white fingers were stronger than they looked, and they were hard to shake off.

"You tell me."

I took him through the house to the back kitchen. Pulling back the burlap that covered the damaged head, I watched Harlan's face. It didn't change. Not a muscle moved. Either Harlan was as cold as a cadaver, or deliberately masking his reaction.

"I've never seen this woman before."

"She's not your sister? Take a good long look." I uncovered the body.

Harlan averted his eyes, his cheeks flushing purple. But his look came creeping sideways back to the body.

"This is your sister, isn't it, Mr. Harlan?"

I had to repeat the question to make him hear. He shook his head negatively. "I never saw her before."

"I don't believe you."

"You don't seriously think I'd refuse to identify my own flesh and blood?"

"If there was money in it."

He didn't hear me. His interest

in the nude body was almost embarrassing. I replaced the burlap and told him what had happened, cutting it short when I saw he wasn't interested.

I took him to the front room and showed him the writing in the dust:

"Is that your sister's handwriting?"

"I couldn't possibly tell."

"Look closely."

Harlan squatted, leaning one arm on the cot. "It's not her writing."

"Did she know Latin?"

"Of course. She taught it. I'm surprised that you do."

"I don't, but my mother was Catholic."

"I see." Rising awkwardly, he stumbled forward on one knee, obliterating the writing.

"Damn you, Harlan!" I said. "You're acting as if you murdered her yourself."

"Don't be absurd." He smiled his thin white-edged smile. "You're morally certain that's Maude in the back room, aren't you?"

"I'm morally certain you were lying. You were too careful not to recognize her."

"Well." He dusted his knee with his hands. "I suppose I had better tell you the truth, since you know it anyway. You're perfectly right; it's my sister. But she wasn't murdered . . ."

The sense of unreality returned to the room. I sat down on the cot, which squealed like an animal under my weight.

"It's a tragic story," Harlan said slowly. "I was rather hoping not to have to tell it. Maude died last night by accident. After I left the studio, she quarreled with Clark over his refusal to admit me. She became irrational, in fact: I've seen it happen to her myself, in the last few months. The truth of the matter is, my sister was losing her mind. Clark tried to quiet her, but she got away from him and flung herself bodily down those outside steps. The fall killed her."

"Is that Clark's version?"

"It's the simple truth. Clark came to my hotel room a short while ago, and told me what had happened. He found my check in your wallet, and realized from that and your professional license that I had hired you to investigate him. The man was in terrible earnest. I know genuine anguish when I see it, and I can tell when a man is telling the truth."

"You're better than I am, then. I think he's playing you for a sucker."

"What?"

"I caught him practically red-handed, trying to bury the body. Now he's lying out of it the best way he can. It strikes me as damn peculiar that you swallowed it."

Harlan's black eyes probed my face. "I assure you Clark's story is the truth. He told me about everything, you see, including the matter of—burial. Put yourself in his place. When Maude killed herself—

was killed—last night, Clark saw immediately that suspicion would fall on him, especially my suspicion. In his panic, he acted like a guilty man. He remembered this place, which he'd come across on a sketching expedition, and brought the body here to dispose of it. His action was rash and even illegal, but I think understandable under the circumstances."

"You're very tolerant all of a sudden. What about the five grand he's been trying to con you for?"

"I beg your pardon."

"The check for five thousand, has it slipped your mind?"

"We'll forget about it," he said impassively. "It's my affair, strictly between Clark and me."

I was beginning to get the situation, if not the motives behind it. Somehow or other Clark had persuaded Harlan to cover for him.

I said with all the irony I could muster: "So we'll bury the body and forget about it."

"Precisely my idea. Not we, however. *You*. I can't afford to become involved in any illegality whatsoever."

"What makes you think I can?"

He removed a leatherette folder from his inside breast pocket and opened it to show me the travellers' checks inside. There were ten hundreds. "One thousand dollars," he said, "seems to me an adequate sexton's fee. Enough to assure forgetfulness as well."

His look was very knowing, but

his passion for money was making him idiotic. He was like a tone-deaf man who couldn't believe that other people heard music and even liked it. But I didn't argue. I let him sign the checks and listened to his instructions. Bury her and forget her.

"I sincerely hate to do this to Maude," he said before he left. "It goes against my grain to leave my sister in an unmarked grave, but I have to consider the greatest good of the greatest number. It would ruin the school if this matter got into the newspapers. I can't let mere fraternal piety interfere with the welfare of the school."

The more Harlan said, the less I understood him. I suspected he was a psychopathic case. Naturally I didn't bury the body. I left it where it lay and followed Harlan back to Santa Monica. I caught the Studebaker before it reached the city, but I let it stay ahead of me.

He parked on Lincoln Boulevard and went into an air travel agency. Before I could find a parking space, he was out again and climbing into his car. I made a note of the agency's name, and followed the Studebaker back to the Oceano Hotel. Harlan left it at the white curb for the garageman. There were shells in my glove compartment, and I reloaded my revolver.

The lobby of the hotel was deserted except for a pair of old ladies playing canasta, and the desk-clerk. I found a telephone booth at the rear, and called the travel agency.

"Sanders' travel agency, Mr. Sanders," a phony British accent said.

"This is J. Reginald Harlan," I said fussily. "Does that mean anything to you?"

"Indeed it does, Mr. Harlan. I trust your reservations are satisfactory?"

"I'm not entirely sure about that. You see, I'm eager to get there as soon as I can."

"I absolutely assure you, Mr. Harlan, I've put you on the earliest available flight. Ten o'clock from International Airport." A trace of impatience showed through the phony accent.

"When do I get there?"

"I thought I'd made that clear. It's written on your envelope."

"I seem to have misplaced the envelope."

"You're scheduled to arrive tomorrow morning at eight o'clock, Chicago time. All right?"

"Thank you."

"Not at all," he said contemptuously and hung up.

IV

I called the hotel switchboard and asked for Harlan.

"Who is speaking, please?" the operator said.

"Clark. Leonard Clark."

"One moment, I'll ring Mr. Harlan's room."

"Don't bother. I'll just go up. He's expecting me. What was the number again?"

"Three-fourteen, sir."

I took an elevator to the third floor. The elevator boy noticed my face, opened his mouth to comment, caught my eye, and shut his mouth without speaking. Harlan's room was at the front of the hotel, in a good location. I knocked.

"Is that you, Leonard?"

"Uh-huh."

Harlan opened the door, and I crowded through. He raised his fists together in front of his chest, like a woman. Looking at me as if he hated me, he said:

"Come in, Mr. Archer."

"I'm in."

"Sit down, then. I'm afraid I wasn't expecting to see you again. So soon," he added. "There hasn't been any trouble?"

"No trouble. Just the same routine murder."

"But it was an accident —"

"Maybe the fall downstairs was an accident. I don't think that fall killed her. There are thumb-prints on her throat."

"But this is all news to me. Do sit down, Mr. Archer, won't you?"

"I'll stand. In the second place, your sister wrote a prayer in the dust in that house. She was alive when Clark took her there. In the third place, you just bought tickets to Chicago, and you're expecting another visit from Clark. Aren't you getting pretty cosy with him?"

"He's my brother-in-law, after all," he answered blandly.

He sat down in an armchair by

the window. Past his narrow cor-morant skull I could see the sky and a distant sea horizon. I spend too much of my time trying to question liars in rented rooms.

"I think he's your partner in crime. You both stand to gain by your sister's death. From what I've seen of the two of you, you're capable of murdering for gain."

Harlan made his hands flop in the air. "My dear good fellow, you couldn't possibly be further wrong. Even apart from the money I've paid you, I do earnestly hope for your sake that you won't act on your ridiculous theory. In the first place," he mimicked me, "if I were in league with Clark, I wouldn't have sought your help this morning, would I?"

"You must have had a reason. I admit I don't see it."

"I came to you in all sincerity. But now I know more about the situation. I tell you in all sincerity that if Clark had murdered my sister I'd follow him to the ends of the earth. You don't know me."

"What about the plane tickets?"

"You've made a mistake. I bought no tickets, and if I had it's no concern of yours. Look here." He showed me the return half of a round-trip ticket between Los Angeles and Cleveland. "You see, I'm flying home to Cleveland tomorrow, by myself."

"Mission accomplished?"

"Damn it!" They were the strongest words I'd heard him use. He rose and came towards me. "Get out of

my room now. I'm sick of the sight of you."

"I'm staying."

"I'll call the house detective."

"Hell, call the police."

He went to the room telephone and lifted the receiver. I stood and watched his bluff fade into nothing. He put the receiver down. I sat in the armchair he had vacated, and he went into the bathroom. I heard him in there retching. He had meant it literally when he said I made him sick.

The phone rang after a while, and I answered it. A woman's voice said: "Reggie? I'm calling from a drug-store. May we come to your room? Leonard thinks it would be safer."

"Naturally."

"Did you get the tickets?"

"Absolutely."

The bathroom door had opened. Harlan flung himself on my back. I hung up carefully before I turned on him. He fought with his nails and his teeth. I had to quiet him the hard way, with my left fist. I dragged him into the bathroom and shut the door on him.

Then I sat on the bed and looked at the telephone. Clark had a woman with him, and she knew Harlan. She knew Harlan well enough to call him Reggie, and Reggie had bought plane tickets for her and Clark. With a wrench that shook me down to my heels, the entire case turned over in my head and lodged at a crazy angle. Over its tilted edge, I saw Dolphine's grief-marked

face, and heard him wheezing that his wife had left him.

There was only one Dolphine in the directory. His telephone rang six times, and then his voice came dimly over the wires: "Hello."

I said bluntly, to keep him from hanging up: "Mrs. Dolphine has left you, I understand."

"What's that? Who are you?"

"A detective investigating a homicide."

"What has my wife got to do with it?"

"That's the question, Mr. Dolphine. Is she there?"

There was a long silence, ending in a "No," that was almost as soft as silence.

"When did she leave?"

"I don't know. She was gone when I came home last night." Self-pity or some other emotion rose audibly in his throat. "This homicide, you don't mean Stella?" The emotion choked him.

"Pull yourself together. You know a man named Leonard Clark?"

"Did he kill her? Is that what you're trying to tell me?"

"I'm not trying to tell you anything. I want to be told, about Leonard Clark and your wife."

"You've arrested him?" He sounded very eager.

"Not yet. I expect to, shortly."

"He was my wife's lover," Dolphine said slowly. "It's been going on for a long time, but I'm the trusting sort, I suppose. I loved my wife deeply. I never suspected her."

He was choking up again. I said sharply: "What about Clark?"

"She rented the studio to him the first of the year. Even then I never suspected, until last month. I came home from the drugstore one night — I'm a pharmacist; I work nights — and they were quarreling back and forth in his studio, shouting at the top of their lungs. She wanted to marry him, divorce me and marry him. He said he would never marry any woman. He said he would see her dead first."

"Will you swear to it?"

"Yes, I'll swear to it. *Did* he kill her?"

"I'm trying to find out."

"He's a bad man," Dolphine said. "When he came back from the east yesterday, he had another woman with him. Claimed he was married to her. I don't know."

"Can you identify this other woman — his wife?"

"I don't see why not. I met her yesterday."

"Can you come here now?"

"Yes, but where?"

"I'm in Santa Monica, at the Oceano Hotel. Room three-fourteen. You better write that down."

There was a flurry of footsteps in the hall.

"Three-fourteen," I repeated.

"Make it as quick as you can, and come right up."

He said that he would. Somebody knocked on the hall door. I hung up, took my revolver out, and carried it to the door, which I swung

wide. Clark was surprised to see me.

His right hand started a movement, which the woman beside him interrupted. She wrapped both arms around his arm, and hung her weight on him. "Please, Leonard, no more violence. I couldn't bear any more violence."

But there had been violence, and she had borne it. The marks of it were on her face. One of her eyes had been blackened, one cheek was ridged diagonally with scratches. Otherwise she was a brilliantly beautiful woman in her twenties, slender-hipped and tall. In spite of her facial damages, she had distinction. "Come in, Clark. Mrs. Dolphine?"

"Are you a policeman?" Her voice was high and desperate.

Clark's free hand covered her mouth. "Be quiet now. Don't say a word. I'll do the talking."

They stumbled into the room in a kind of lock-step. I shut the door with my heel. The woman sat down on the bed. The marks on her face were vivid against her pallor. Clark stood in front of her:

"Where's Harlan?"

"I'll ask the questions."

He took a threatening step. I levelled the gun at his stomach. "This is loaded. I'll use it if I have to."

The woman spoke behind him. "Listen to me, Leonard. It isn't any use. Violence only breeds further violence. Haven't you learned that yet?"

"Don't worry, there won't be

any trouble. I know how to deal with him." He turned to me, a white smile flashing in his beard. "I suppose it's money you're after."

"Harlan supposed that, too. He paid me a thousand dollars to bury a murdered woman and forget her. I'm turning his checks over to the police."

The woman sighed. "Darling. These shifts and stratagems — can't you see how squalid and horrible they are? We've tried your way and it's failed; it's failed miserably. It's time to try my way."

"No, Maude, we haven't failed." He sat on the bed and spoke very gently, an arm around her shoulders. "Just let me talk to him. He's only a private detective. Your brother hired him this morning."

"Where is my brother now?" she asked me.

I indicated the bathroom door with my gun. For some reason it was embarrassing to hold a naked weapon in front of her. I pushed it down into my jacket pocket.

"You're Maude Harlan."

"I was. I am Mrs. Leonard Clark. This is my husband." She looked up into his face, and I caught a glimpse of the thing between them, sudden and bright as lightning.

"The dead one is Stella Dolphine."

"Is that her first name? It's strange to have killed a woman without even knowing her name."

"You killed her, then."

"No." The word was torn pain-

fully from Clark's throat. "Maude doesn't know what she's saying. She's had a bad time —"

"It's over now, Leonard." She gave him a bright smile and me the sad vestige of it. "Leonard wasn't there. He was taking a shower when the woman — when Mrs. Dolphine came to our door."

"Why did you kill her?"

Clark said: "It was my fault, all of it, from the beginning. I had no right to marry a decent woman, drag her down into the life I live. I was crazy to bring her back to that apartment."

Her fingers touched his hairy mouth. "It was bad luck. I scarcely know how it happened. It simply happened. She asked me who I was, and I told her I was Leonard's wife. She became furious, calling me a liar and other names. Finally she attacked me with her fists. I tried to restrain her. She pulled me by the hair onto the outside landing. I pushed her away somehow, and she fell backwards down the steps. I think I fainted, then."

"Yes," Clark said. "My wife was lying on the landing when I came out of the shower. It took me a long time to bring her to and find out what had happened. I put her to bed and went down to see if Stella was all right. She was dead, at the foot of the steps."

"She was in love with you, wasn't she?" his wife said.

"I guess she was."

"Were you in love with her?"

"No. I wasn't." He added more gently: "I thought I was for a while."

"She was beautiful." There was a questioning sadness in her voice.

"She isn't any more," I cut in. "She's dead, and you've been carting her body around the countryside. Why?"

Behind the great masculine beard, Clark had the shamefaced air of a delinquent boy. "I panicked. Maude wanted to call the police right away, but I've had trouble with them, drunk driving and that sort of thing. Besides, I knew what Dolphine would do if he found Stella dead at my door. He hates me." The naive blue eyes were blurred with the confused beginnings of insight. "I don't blame him."

"What would he do?"

"Cry murder, and pin it on me."

"How? The way your wife described it, it's a clear case of justifiable manslaughter."

"Is it? I wouldn't know. I guess I felt guilty about her—I wasn't thinking too well. All I wanted to do was hide the body and get Maude out of the country, away from the mess I'd made."

"Aren't you taking a plane to Chicago?"

"That's the plan now. It's my brother-in-law's idea. After you tracked us down, I came here to him and told him what had happened. He said leaving the country would be an admission of guilt, if the case ever came to trial. We de-

ecided to go to Chicago. I have friends in Chicago." He leaned towards me. "If you have any humanity, you'll let us go to Chicago. My wife is a gentlewoman, if that means anything to you. She can't go through a trial, with the dirt they'll dig up about me and throw in her face."

I said: "I have some humanity. Not enough to go around. At the moment Stella Dolphine is using most of it."

"You said yourself it was justifiable manslaughter."

"The way your wife told it, yes."

"Don't you believe me?" She sounded astonished.

"As far as your story goes, I believe you. But you don't know all the facts. There are deep thumbprints on the front of her throat. I've seen marks like them on other throats, on the throats of women that were strangled to death."

"No," she whispered. "I swear it. I only pushed her."

"You set her up for somebody else," I said. "Somebody else found her unconscious and throttled her. You, Clark?"

His head sank like an exhausted bull's. He didn't look at his wife.

"Stella Dolphine made trouble for you. If she lived, she would make worse trouble. You thought you could put an end to it by finishing her off. It was a cruel thing to do, cruel to her and cruel to your wife and cruel to Dolphine."

"All right," he said to the floor.

"If I admit it, and take the rap for it, will you let Maude go free, back to Cleveland with her brother?"

She thrust her face forward to his body and said against it: "No."

He turned and held her. I looked away from them, out the window to the darkening sea. They were fairly decent people, as people go, and I was tormenting them. The case turned over in my head again, like a monster struggling to be born out of my mind. I said in a voice I barely recognized: "This has gone far enough. To hell with it."

A door creaked behind me. I thought it was Harlan emerging from the bathroom, and I turned in the wrong direction.

Dolphine was in the room before I saw him, a heavy service automatic wavering in his hand. He advanced on Clark:

"I heard you. You killed her, you bastard. You killed her."

The gun spoke once, very loudly. Its recoil jarred him. I knocked it out of his hand and pinned him against the wall.

He was wheezing. Water ran from his eyes and nose. A stale sour smell rose from his flaccid body, like something which has spilled and dried in a corner.

"How do you know he killed her, Dolphine?"

"He confessed it. I was listening at the door."

"But he was lying."

"He wasn't. I saw him." His eyes were inflamed, glowing redly like

chinks in the door of hell. "I saw him do it."

"You were there?"

"I was just getting home from work. I saw him strangle her with his bare hands and put her into his car."

"But you didn't call the police?"

"No. I —" His mouth groped for words. "I'm a sick man. I was too sick to call them. Upset. I couldn't talk."

"You're going to have to talk now. It wasn't Clark, was it? It was you."

He choked and turned deep red. I released him. His legs collapsed, and he sat down on the floor. Great pumping sobs forced words out of his mouth:

"She was disloyal to me. She fouled my bed. She got what she deserved for spoiling my life. I don't regret it. She got what she deserved."

He rolled sideways and turned his face to the wall. I picked up his gun. Clark and his wife were still sitting on the bed. Her face lay open and stunned on his shoulder.

"He missed you, huh?"

"I've been missed twice today," he said cheerfully. "I think my luck's coming back."

"Don't lean too heavily on it. The frameup might have stuck if Dolphine had gone to the police instead of coming here."

"What brought him here anyway?"

"I did."

"What for? You almost got me shot."

"You almost got yourself arrested for murder."

"But you knew he was guilty all along. Didn't you?"

"He's not the only guilty one," I said. "He's just the one who's got to take the rap."

Clark's wife whispered: "You'll be good to me, Leonard? Be good to me."

"I'll try." His head bowed over her and covered her face.

Harlan had opened the bathroom

door. He looked at me with hatred, at the lovers with desolation. Unnoticed by them, he stood like a wallflower against the door-frame. I went to the telephone.

Dolphine was sobbing in the corner. While the operator was ringing the police station, Harlan went to Dolphine and put a thin grey arm around his shoulders: "I'm sorry, old man. I always say the wrong thing, I'm afraid, but I'm sorry about your wife."

Then the desk-sergeant's voice was harsh in my ear.



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Cooperate, Callan told the girl. Play ball — or we'll fry your husband even if I have to go ahead and frame him by myself.

DETECTIVE Lieutenant Henry Callan stood very still in the middle of his cheap hall bedroom, bulky shoulders slumping a little, listening to the early morning sounds in the house around him — a tall, heavily muscled, flat-bellied man with short-cropped graying hair and pale blue eyes with tiny hoods at the corners.

BY JONATHAN CRAIG



Somebody was running water in the bathroom directly above him, and next door the bed springs had been creaking rhythmically for almost twenty minutes. On the other side, where the landlady lived, a radio announcer interrupted a dance tune to say that the time was seventy.

Callan sighed and lifted his trousers from the back of a chair. Seventy. That gave him another ten minutes before he had to go outside to meet Kimberly. Jesus, that guy Kimberly was hard to take. Ten months on the Force, and already he was bucking for a gold badge.

To hell with Kimberly. And to hell with the Old Man and all the rest of them. He walked back to the bed and reached beneath it for the gin bottle. Thank God he'd saved himself a corner for this morning: his head felt like somebody had worked it over with a billy.

Ten minutes later, when Callan climbed into the front seat of the cruiser with Kimberly, his hang-over was fading, but there was still enough of it left to be bothersome.

Kimberly's grinning young face was shaved so closely it was pink. Nodding, he got the cruiser under way, and looked at Callan.

"Looks like another scorcher today, Lieutenant. You can tell already. Worst hot spell we've had in twelve years, the paper says."

"So it's hot," Callan mumbled. "So what?"

Kimberly shrugged. "Where to first? Precinct?"

"No," Callan said. He fished a folded piece of paper from his jacket pocket and glanced at it. "One sixty-seven Beckman Street."

"Who's there?"

"Tommy Hobart's wife."

Kimberly whistled softly. "A real looker, I hear. You ever see her?"

"No."

Kimberly turned right at the next intersection. "How'd you make out with Hobart last night, Lieutenant?"

"No good. We knocked off about midnight, and he hadn't so much as opened his yap." He glanced sharply at Kimberly. "You hear anything around the precinct this morning?"

"Nothing much," Kimberly said. "While I was picking up the car, Sergeant Gault made some crack about Hobart still having lockjaw, but that's all. He must be a pretty tough boy."

"Not so tough. I could put an Irish potato in a sock and find out in five minutes whether or not he killed that florist. If it wasn't for the Old Man screaming like hell, I'd have done it last night."

"The Old Man's pretty tough."

"He used to be, you mean. Not any more. He's soft now, but when he was a rookie cop he used to make an arrest and then hammer the guy on the shinbones with his nightstick, so the guy's legs would be too sore for him to make a break while the Old Man called the wagon."

"Jesus," Kimberly said softly.

Callan stripped the cellophane from a cigar, bit off the end, and worried it around in his mouth without lighting it.

"You figure Hobart did it, Lieutenant?" Kimberly asked.

"Maybe. So far, all we've got is circumstantial crap. Without a confession, the D.A. couldn't even get an indictment. He needs this one bad, and he's putting the heat on the Old Man. So maybe the Old Man'll have to look the other way and let me use that sock after all."

"Jesus," Kimberly said again.

Callan studied him. "You aren't just a little too squeamish for a cop, are you, George?" He laughed softly. "Either Hobart botched a hold-up and killed a fairy florist, or he didn't. Either the D.A. gets a confession and fries Hobart, or he doesn't. What the hell — it's no skin off yours and mine, either way."

Kimberly turned the cruiser into a wide residential street and eased up on the gas pedal. "This is Beckman Street," he said. "One sixty-seven?"

"Yeah. Must be at the end of this block. And listen — I want you to wait outside. You see anybody about to come up the walk, give them the boot. Okay?"

Kimberly nodded, leaning down a little to peer across Callan at the numbers on the houses. "That's it," he said. "Next one to the corner." He braked the cruiser at the curb

and sat waiting, his lips tight together, not looking at Callan.

Callan laughed. "You'll get over being squeamish," he said. He opened the door and got out. "This might take a little time, George. It all depends." He slammed the door and walked up the flagstones to the small, freshly painted bungalow.

The woman who opened the screen to Callan's sharp knock was even younger than he had expected her to be. Not more than twenty, he guessed, and maybe not even that. And she was pretty; no question about it. How the hell had a homely jerk like Hobart got himself a kid like this?

Her blue eyes were questioning him.

He waited. Let her sweat a little.

She pushed a loose strand of auburn hair back from her forehead. Even without make-up, Callan noticed, her lips were full and red.

"Police," Callan said.

She drew her thin cotton housecoat more tightly about her and looked past him at the black and white cruiser.

"All right," Callan said. "Do I come in, or do we ring the neighbors in on this?"

She shrugged and opened the screen a little wider. He pushed past her into the living room, picked out the most likely looking chair, and sat down.

He smiled at her. "You're Carol Hobart?" he asked.

She nodded. Her lashes fluttered. "Lieutenant Callan," he said. He kept his eyes on the jutting swell of her breasts until she colored and looked away from him. "Sit down, Mrs. Hobart. We're going to talk a little."

She sank down on the sofa. "What about Tommy?" she asked. "What about him?"

"You know he didn't have any thing to do with that — that hold-up."

He smiled at her. "I'm a homicide cop, Mrs. Hobart. It's murder we're talking about, not a hold-up."

She shook her head slowly. "Tommy couldn't have done it. He *couldn't* have. Those other detectives kept asking me the same questions over and over again, and I —"

"Sure, sure," Callan said. "You kept telling them Tommy couldn't have done it."

"But he didn't!"

Callan took the unlit cigar from his mouth and slipped it into his jacket pocket. He let his eyes rove down Carol Hobart's body until they came to rest on her ankles.

"Stop it," she said tightly. "Stop staring at me like that."

He was beginning to enjoy Mrs. Hobart. And there was time; as much time as he wanted to take.

"Let's face some hard facts," he said. "Your husband's headed straight for the chair, Mrs. Hobart. I'm in charge of the case now, and I'm going to put him in the hot squat just as sure as hell."

Her hands came up to her throat. "No! God, no!"

"Yeah," he said. "The chair." He watched her carefully. "All the D.A. needs is a confession, and then Tommy gets his head shaved. And you know something, Mrs. Hobart? I'm the guy that's going to get that confession."

"But he didn't *do* it!"

Callan got up and walked to the window and looked out at the cruiser. "Maybe he didn't," he said softly. "But I know ways to make him say he did."

Behind him, he heard her quick intake of breath.

"Yeah," he said. "There are ways, Mrs. Hobart. They aren't pretty, but they work. Every time."

"You — you'd actually do that?" Her voice was scarcely more than a whisper.

Callan folded his arms behind him and watched a woman watering flowers in the yard across the street. A moving van lumbered by, swerved out wide around the police cruiser, and turned the corner.

"It could happen," he told her. "It's happened before — why not this time?" He shrugged. "Of course, it doesn't *have* to happen, Mrs. Hobart. . . ." He turned and stared at her steadily. "What's one more confession to me? My pay stays the same, either way."

She moistened her lips, looking at him without blinking, slender fingers toying nervously with the neckline of her housecoat.

He crossed to her and held her eyes with his until she looked away. "I got nothing to gain by helping the D.A. fry your husband, Mrs. Hobart. Nothing at all. But look at it another way. Suppose I didn't even try to get a confession? Suppose I just told my boss and the D.A. that it was no use, and they let Tommy go?" He could smell her now. It was no perfume, he knew; it was the natural feminine aroma of her young body. He moved a little closer.

"Suppose I work it so Tommy gets off?" he said softly. "What then, Mrs. Hobart?"

She looked up at him with eyes that had grown so dark they were almost black. Her lips spread back from small white teeth and her voice was thick with revulsion. "You animal!" she whispered. "You horrible, filthy animal!"

Callan rubbed his sweating palms along the sides of his trousers. He unbuttoned his jacket and loosened his tie and ran a thick finger along the inside of his shirt collar. "Hot, isn't it?"

Her lips moved, but there was no sound.

"Try to think of it from my viewpoint," Callan said. "There are some things a man has to have. Say I found it right here. Why, then, I'd be grateful. I'd go on downtown and tell the D.A. to call it quits. Tommy'd be home in a couple hours, and he'd never know the difference."

He ran a thumbnail along the line of his jaw and dropped his eyes to her tiny belted waist. "But the cost of living is pretty high these days, Mrs. Hobart. Just one time with you wouldn't be quite enough for me to keep Tommy out of the chair. Naturally, you might see me again now and then. Not often, mind you — but now and then."

He brought his eyes up to her face again, watching her carefully. This was the big moment. This was when they always made up their minds. He flexed his fingers at his sides, and smiled at her, and waited. Jesus, he thought, if this works out it's going to be one hell of a score.

A full minute went by, and another, and still she sat and stared up at him. Occasionally her lips trembled, but there was no other movement. Somewhere nearby a lawnmower started whirring, and a moment later some kids went past the house on roller skates.

Callan sighed. "It's one way or the other, Mrs. Hobart. Either you want Tommy fried, or you don't."

She got to her feet slowly, as if she were very weak and ill, and moved past him toward the rear of the house. He followed her through the dining room to the bedroom. Just inside the door of the bedroom, she paused and turned to face him. Her lips were pale now, and she spoke as if she had scarcely enough strength to articulate the words.

"How do I know you aren't lying? That you won't just . . . just . . ."

"You don't," he said. "It's a gamble, like everything else in this world." He smiled at her, and let the smile widen. "But you're going to be reasonable, Mrs. Hobart, because you know damn well it's the only hope Tommy's got."

Callan waited until the rookie cop had closed and locked the cell door behind him, and then he sat down on the steel mesh cot beside Tommy Hobart.

"Well, Tommy," he said pleasantly, "they tell me you're still being stubborn."

Hobart's thin face was sheened with sweat, and his gray sport shirt was dark with sweat beneath the arms and across his narrow chest. He mopped damp, dark hair away from his forehead and glared at Callan with deep-set eyes that were not quite able to hide their fear.

"So it's your turn again," he said bitterly. "The brainy boys gave up, so now we've got *you* back again."

Callan pursed his lips and stared at the galvanized bucket that served Tommy Hobart as a lavatory. "Yeah," he said, "I can see you're still set on being stubborn."

Hobart's voice was ragged with fatigue. "What do you want me to do? You want me to say I killed a man, and all the time you know goddam well I never even been near him!"

Callan got up and walked to the toilet and flushed it. "You ought to take better care of this place,

Tommy," he said. He leaned against the wall and put the dead cigar in his mouth and studied Hobart with tired, hooded eyes. It was past twelve o'clock, and he still hadn't had breakfast, but he felt no desire for food.

I've got to watch it, he thought. I'm as taut as a piano wire. What I need is a good stiff slug of gin.

"How the hell can you hold me at a precinct-like this?" Hobart asked. "What kind of slimy deal are you pulling, anyhow? Why can't I see my lawyer again?"

"You saw your lawyer," Callan told him. "But he couldn't get a writ and spring you, could he?" He shook his head sadly. "No, he couldn't do that. He couldn't get to anybody, Tommy, because the D.A. had already got there first."

He watched Hobart's eyes carefully, and suddenly it came to him that Hobart was ready to crack. He'd seen it happen a hundred times before. He knew all the signs, and they were all there, on Hobart's face and in his eyes.

Brother, he thought. How lucky can you get? If I break this kid solo, I can hit the Old Man up for an extra week's leave. He walked to the door and looked both ways along the corridor to make sure there was no one there, and then he leaned up against the wall again.

You've got to bust him up all at once, he thought. Right now he's getting all his guts from thinking of his wife. Make him realize she's been

cheating, and he'll bust wide open. Get it in fast, and deep, and break it off in him.

He studied Hobart another moment to make certain the signs were right, and then he said, "That's a real pretty wife you got, Tommy." He made it sound friendly. "Real pretty."

"Leave her out of this, for Christ's sake!"

"I spent a little time with her this morning. Couple hours." He shook his head. "Must be pretty tough for her. Wouldn't you say so?"

Tommy Hobart spat on the floor.

"Heat set a record today," Callan said. "Good day to go swimming. You ever take Carol swimming, Tommy?"

Hobart's eyes narrowed slightly, but he said nothing.

Callan took the cigar from his mouth and looked at it and then slipped it back into his pocket. "I guess you're pretty proud when you take her to the beach, eh, Tommy? I mean, with that body she's got and all."

Hobart started to rise, but Callan put his big hand flat against the younger man's chest and pushed him back down on the cot again.

"You bastard," Hobart said. "Jesus, if I ever get out of here, I'll —"

"Take it easy, son," Callan said. "Don't let me lose my train of thought." He hummed softly a moment, smiling at Hobart.

"You bastard," Hobart said.

"Funny thing, Tommy," Callan

said, "but you damned seldom find a woman without a blemish on her somewhere. You ever think about that? Now you take Carol, for instance. Who'd ever figure she had a crescent-shaped birthmark where she's got it. I mean, she'd have to be mother naked before you'd ever guess. Right?"

He watched the things that crawled in Tommy Hobart's eyes, and braced himself. When Hobart came at him, Callan was ready. He caught Hobart's driving fist in the palm of his hand and stabbed the straight, rigid fingers of his other hand into the soft hollow just beneath Hobart's breastbone.

Hobart went down in a whimpering, gagging heap — and only then Callan realized that Hobart had spat in his face. He took out his handkerchief and wiped his cheek and threw the handkerchief in the direction of the toilet.

He watched Hobart being sick on the cement floor. Hobart was ripe now, he knew. He had him sick in every way a man could be sick. All he had to do was start hammering him with the same old question, over and over again.

But even as Callan's mind framed the words, he realized with sickening suddenness that he was cutting his own throat.

It wasn't Tommy Hobart's confession he wanted.

It was Tommy Hobart's wife.

If he got a confession out of Hobart, then he'd have no club to

hold over Carol Hobart's head. And without a club, there'd be no more times like this morning.

He ran his tongue across dry lips, breathing heavily, staring down at Tommy Hobart, and then he turned and rattled the bars.

The rookie cop came down the corridor and unlocked the door and stood back to let Callan pass outside. His eyes shuttled from Callan to Hobart and back again. "What happened, Lieutenant?"

"He jumped me," Callan said. "I didn't touch him. He just jumped me for no reason at all."

There was something in the rookie's eyes Callan didn't like; something very close to revulsion. "I'll bet," the rookie said.

Jesus, Callan thought, another squeamish cop. Another George Kimberly. Another jerk with a lot of crap in his head about the way prisoners should be treated. Jesus, it was getting so you couldn't make a move without nine-tenths of the Force ganging up on you and yelping about brutality. To hell with them. To hell with the whole lily-livered bunch of them.

He smiled at the rookie. "Better straighten him out a little. He looks real sick."

"All right."

"Sir."

"All right, sir."

Callan strode down the corridor, nodded to the desk sergeant, and went down the steps to the street. The cruiser was parked at the curb

and Private Kimberly was polishing the windshield. Kimberly glanced up at Callan, and then moved quickly to open the door for him.

"Never mind, George," Callan said. "I won't be needing a car any more this afternoon. I got a couple of things to work out, but I don't need the car."

Kimberly nodded. "Anything you want me to do, Lieutenant?"

"No. Go on in and tell them you can haul somebody else around." He turned and walked slowly toward Locust Street. At the corner he bought a fifth of gin, and then took a cab to his rooming house.

He got a tumbler of luke-warm water from the bathroom, opened the bottle, and sat down on the rumpled bed. He sipped alternately at the gin and the water until he had taken the bottle down a good three inches, and then he put bottle and glass on the floor and lay back on the bed and shut his eyes.

He lay quite still, waiting for the gin to hit him. The house radio. He reached behind his head and rapped on the thin wall, and after a moment the radio was turned down a little.

He listened to the soft throb of the dance music and thought of Carol Hobart. She was really something; no question about it. Jesus, a girl like that could knock a man off his rocker. She could get to be worse than heroin.

Why the hell wasn't that gin taking hold? A slug like he'd had should have grabbed him by now.

He sat up suddenly and reached for the bottle. Thank God there was nothing wrong with his stomach. He could tuck a pint away, and the old belly would never holler once.

He tilted the bottle and let the gin run down his throat until he gagged, and then he held the bottle up and looked at it. Damn near half. Should do the trick, if it was ever going to do it.

He finished the water in the tumbler and recapped the bottle and left the room. Maybe if he walked around a while, the exercise and the sun would hurry the gin along. Without exactly the right buzz. Carol Hobart wasn't going to be any good to him. And with that damn husband of hers ready to crack, it had to be this afternoon, or never. Christ, it would be just his luck to have one of the other cops get a paper from Hobart. Maybe Hobart was talking now.

He walked four blocks in the broiling sun before he felt the full effect of the gin. The feeling of urgency left him, and now he began to savor the anticipation of how it would be with Carol. Maybe if he put it off another hour, it would be even better. What the hell? Everybody knew that it was always nine-tenths expectation and one-tenth realization. He turned in at the first bar and had two fast gills of gin.

When he stepped out on the street again, he felt right. Exactly right to do justice to Tommy Hobart's wife.

He walked another block to a cab stand and gave the driver the address on Beckman Street. To hell with phoning her first, he thought.

Carol Hobart had changed to high heels and a green silk jersey dress that clung to the swelling curves of her young body so snugly that Callan could see the outlines of her lingerie. She was wearing make-up now, and her thick auburn hair was caught back at the nape of her neck.

She let the screen slam shut behind Callan and stared at him with empty blue eyes.

"I was sort of expecting you," she said tonelessly. "But not so soon."

He let his eyes rove the length of her body, and back again. "Jesus."

"What do you want?"

He smiled at her.

She looked at him steadily, and her expression was exactly the same.

"I was going out," she said. "I have business downtown."

"You've got business right here," Callan said. "Right now."

She moistened her lips. There was something strange about her eyes, Callan noticed. It wasn't fear, and it wasn't revulsion. Maybe she's got used to the idea, he thought. Maybe.

He shrugged. "You know damn well what'll happen."

Her eyes grew cloudy, and then, not looking at him, she moved past him toward the bedroom. He followed her, watching the lithe swing of her hips beneath the jersey.

Callan heeled the door shut be-

hind them and stripped off his jacket and hung it over the back of a chair. Then he unbuckled his shoulder harness with the short-barrelled Detective Special, draped the harness over the jacket, and moved toward Carol Hobart.

"Poor Tommy," he said.

She sprang at him, suddenly, like a tigress. Her fingernails raked across his eyes and down his face deeply.

He yelled and clubbed a fist at her face, and then a hard bare knee blurred upward toward his groin.

Soured gin welled up in his throat, and he fell to his hands and knees in a blinding burst of pain. When, finally, his vision cleared, he looked up into the muzzle of his own revolver.

"You louse," Carol Hobart said.

"God," Callan said. "Don't! For Christ's sake, don't!"

Her eyes were steady now, round and hard and black. She held the gun with one hand, and with the other she reached up and ripped the green dress all the way down to the waist. She caught one of the short, puff sleeves and ripped it loose, and then she tore the narrow belt from her waist.

She drew her lips back from her teeth, and stared at him, and the laugh that came from her mouth was like no laugh Callan had ever heard before.

"They called me," she said. "The police called me. Not ten minutes ago. They said they'd caught the

man who killed the florist. Do you hear that, you bastard?"

"God," Callan said.

She moved a step nearer him. "They caught the man, and he admitted it, and now they're going to let Tommy go. I was on my way to him when you came. If you'd come a minute later, I wouldn't have been here at all."

Callan made a desperate lunge for her legs, but she was faster than he was.

She took another step backward, and laughed at him, and then she hooked her fingers in the frothy white material of her brassiere and ripped it apart.

"You know what's going to happen?" she asked. "People are going to think you tried to attack me. They'll see me like this, and you with your face clawed, and they're going to believe everything I tell them. I'm going to scream, so that people will come running. But you'll never see them. Before anyone can get here, you're going to be dead."

Callan shook his head slowly, his eyes pleading with her. "For God's sake," he gasped. "Don't . . ."

"You're never going to do anybody else the way you did Tommy and me! Never!"

Callan tried to speak, but his lips and throat were numb, and the words would not come.

He was still trying to speak when Carol Hobart screamed and pulled the trigger.

First of a new series

CRIME CAVALCADE

BY VINCENT H. GADDIS

F for Futility

Energetic and eager burglars in Omaha, Nebraska, learned the hard way last June that crime does not pay. They broke into the offices of a lumber company by prying the lock from a heavy door, and carried a 700-pound safe out of the building. Next, they stole a truck, loaded the safe on it, and drove to the outskirts of the city, where they abandoned the truck and blasted open the safe.

Lumber company officials told the police the following morning that some loose change in the safe might have amounted to about \$4.

Case of the Contrary Clues

Deliberate planting of numerous phony clues by the slayer has left the murder of 20-year-old Leila Welsh unsolved in the records of Kansas City, Mo. police for 12 years. Early on the morning of March 9, 1941, the killer entered the home through a first floor bedroom window and murdered the sleeping young woman by crushing in both sides of her head with a heavy instrument. Police were puzzled by the fact that although no attempt had been made

at criminal assault, the victim's throat was slashed and many other parts of her body mutilated with a knife.

After committing the crime the murderer scattered over the floor about 40 cigarette butts apparently collected off the streets, a stonemason's hammer, a butcher knife that had not been used in the slaying, a pair of clean cotton gloves, and a man's shirt and trousers that had been taken from the trash can of a neighbor.

Investigating officers said the girl had no known enemies and was not involved in any love affairs. No motive for the murder has ever been found.

Destiny of Disaster

In Chicago, 20-year-old Stanley Snyder attempted to launch a career as burglar. Arming himself with a toy pistol, he rode the elevated to suburban Evanston and started work under the light of a full moon. He ran into trouble right away. Selecting a tailor shop for his first job, he set off a burglar alarm before he succeeded in entering the establishment.

When the police arrived, Snyder was several blocks away trying to

break into a restaurant. He was stopped by a jimmy-proof door. Next, he tried another restaurant but a second stubborn door barred his way. Finally he broke into a station of the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad by ripping out a window screen. He was able to jimmy open the outer door of the station safe, but he couldn't vanquish the small inner door.

His patience exhausted, Snyder broke down completely. He called police on the ticket office telephone. "I'm a failure," he told the desk sergeant. "I'm going to kill myself."

Police rushed to the station and caught him, still at the telephone. After he was brought to police headquarters, Snyder was so downhearted he wept.

Alias Jimmy Valentine

The fact that there are persons with a skill for opening safes that is almost psychic is well known to criminologists. Many of these men work as honest locksmiths and use their ability in opening vault doors that have become "frozen." Occasionally such an individual turns to crime.

In June, 1921, three safes in the offices of a large oil company were discovered open. Not a scratch was found on any of the doors, and all of the vaults had been locked by triple combinations known only to three officials above suspicion. Moreover the thief had picked the street door lock and the locks on four

office doors before he reached the safes.

According to Henry Morton Robinson in his book "*Science Catches the Criminal*" every bit of evidence pointed to the fact that the burglar had "felt" and "listened" his way through these combination locks, thus achieving the most amazing safe robbery ever performed anywhere at any time.

The loot amounted to \$200,000. The crime has never been solved.

Beating Bingo

A method to beat Bingo was recently uncovered by police in Jersey City, N. J., following the arrest of three men and a woman who had won too steadily. Officers said the quartet took blank Bingo cards and printing paraphernalia to the games and literally printed the winning numbers as they were called.

Reverse Robbery

In Grand Rapids, Mich., several months ago, a stranger accosted Raymond Luxford, 19, in a restaurant and asked him to eat with him.

"Sorry, but I'm not hungry," objected Luxford.

Suddenly Luxford found himself with a pistol barrel against his ribs. "You're hungry now, aren't you?" the stranger asked.

Luxford agreed. He ate a meal while the gunman sipped coffee, discussed the weather, business conditions and politics. Then the stranger paid the check and departed.

Luxford hurried to the nearest police station and reported the incident. The officers agreed that giving people things at gunpoint was not favored by Emily Post, but wondered what charge they could file against the stranger if they caught him.

Convicted by a Ghost

Edward S. Shue was the only man in the annals of modern law to be convicted of murder by the evidence of a ghost.

The victim was Mrs. Zona Shue, Edward's wife, whose murder was not suspected until two weeks after her burial. At that time her mother, Mrs. Heaster of Lewisburg, West Virginia, told authorities that her daughter had appeared at her bedside for four successive nights saying that she had been slain by her husband.

Details of the crime were given by the apparition, including the fact that her clothing had been concealed under some planks in the cellar of her home. As a result of these nocturnal visitations an investigation

was launched. The body was exhumed, and it was found that a bone in the neck had been fractured and there were slight bruises on the throat. Moreover clothing was found in the cellar in the exact location stated by the phantom.

Edward Shue went on trial for murder at Lewisburg in April, 1897. Although the jury was instructed to ignore the supernatural aspects of the case, the court allowed testimony to be presented by Mrs. Heaster as to the apparition's statements.

Shue was found guilty and sent to prison for life.

To Each His Vice

Apparently the thieves who stole a car owned by Elmer Davis at Marblehead, Mass., several months ago don't smoke. All that was found of the car two days later was the body and two ashtrays. The insides had been stripped efficiently.

The thieves had taken the engine, wheels, drive shaft, seats, transmission, dashboard, spare tire, battery, wiring, lights and accessories.





Denham liked the new job at the Ganns' house. The house contained a quarter of a million in jewels — and a beautiful babe.

BY ROBERT PATRICK WILMOT

I

DENHAM hit the big red-haired man where sweat glued his flowered silk sport-shirt tight against his swollen paunch, and the red-haired man made a whistling sound

through lips that were loosened by the force of the blow. He stood for a moment, swaying, half doubled over, and Denham stepped in, graceful as a ballet dancer, and flicked a fast left hand against the gaping mouth.

"I'll kill you for this, you skinny punk," the red-haired man snarled, and hunched his thick-muscled shoulders and came at Denham, lurching along the bar. He moved directly into a left hook that thudded solidly against his jaw, a right hand that buried itself wrist deep in the roll of soft flesh above the belt of his gabardine slacks.

The red-haired man went down, squatting on his haunches, rocking in silent agony. Denham turned back to the bar, raised his whisky

Stakeout

glass and emptied it, and spoke quietly, out of a corner of his mouth. "I wouldn't get up if I were you, slobbo," he said to the red-haired man. "If I were you, I wouldn't ever get up. Not unless I had a big accident policy in force."

The cocktail lounge bouncer, a mountain of flesh even larger than the red-haired man, came lumbering along the bar and looked at Denham with a brief, hard glance of mingled amusement and respect.

"A guy keeps askin' for it, he usually manages to get it somewheres," the bouncer said in a weary voice. "This guy calls you names that are fighting names any place, even a refined joint like this, so you clip him, and that's that. Only, please, mister, don't get any ideas about runnin' pool on the rest of the customers."

"I haven't an idea in the world," Denham said.

The bouncer hooked his enormous fat hands into the red-haired man's armpits, hauled him to his feet, bumped him suddenly with a belly that was huge and round, and hard as stone beneath its cushion of quivering fat. He did not lay his hands upon the red-haired man again; he kept his hands dangling at his sides as he slowly pushed him towards the door, using the great mound of his belly as though it were a ram. The heat of the humid night flowed into the clammy coolness of the air-conditioned room like a gush of sour-smelling vapor, and then the red-haired man was gone. The bouncer pulled the door shut, waddled back to his place at the end of the bar, picked up his lighted cigar. At a table in a corner, a woman's near-hysterical laughter jangled, and a juke-box heaved out a grinding, thumping sound that turned to soft music as a new record spun behind the lighted glass.

Denham ordered another drink and smiled a lonely man's tight, restrained smile at his own reflection in the tall mirror behind the bar.

He was a little above medium height, and thin, but he was not skinny, as the red-haired man had said. Long muscles lay like uncoiled springs upon Denham's heavy, sloping shoulders, and bunched thickly along a torso that tapered into flat hips. He was a man who might have been handsome, if his gray eyes had been less bitter, his thin mouth less harsh; a man who might have looked young, if it had not been for his hair. Denham's dark hair was thickly shot with gray, and the grayness of it gleamed like dull silver in the faint light that fell across the bar.

The bartender slid his refilled glass along the damp wood, slopping whisky over the rim of the glass. "This one is on me, Champ," he said to Denham. "I really got a charge out of watching you belt that jerk. He was big enough to wear box-car numbers, too. But like old Bob Fitzsimmons said, the bigger they are, the harder they fall."

Denham nodded absently, his eyes on the mirror, watching a man and a girl who were moving towards him across the smoke-veiled room.

The man was tall and middle-aged and very neat in a clean white linen suit, and thick dark glasses added to the emptiness of his pale and utterly expressionless face. The girl had a cold, serenely beautiful face and honey-colored hair, and she was wonderfully made. Her full, pointed breasts and delicately rounded hips made a slow, rhythmic motion as

her legs carried her towards Denham in a prowling, graceful walk, and Denham thought that her sheath-tight silk dress made her look more naked than if she had been nude. As they approached, he saw that her companion clung to her arm, and he decided, without either surprise or compassion, that the tall man was blind.

The girl's red lips curved into a mechanical smile as she halted near Denham, and she looked at him with long-lashed dark eyes that held excitement — and some provocative quality — in their depths. "That took nerve, what you did," she said, and Denham had heard half a dozen torch singers who had just such a deep voice as hers. "It took nerve, and skill, because that redhead is a tough big thug, a real gorilla, and people don't push him around."

The tall man smiled at Denham with pale lips. "Allow me to introduce us," he said, in a low, precise voice that was almost lost in the noise of the room. "I'm Wade Ganns, and this is my wife, Audrey. I couldn't see the fracas, of course, but Audrey gave me a blow-by-blow account, and I was very much impressed."

Denham grunted a noncommittal reply, and the girl looked at his heavy shoulders, his face, his gray hair. After a moment of silent scrutiny, she turned to her husband and spoke in an almost impersonal voice. "He looks very competent, Wade. And quite nice. By no means a

goon." The dark eyes swung away from the tall man's face and fixed themselves on Denham in a level stare as she asked: "I don't suppose, by any chance, that you would be unemployed?"

"You must be carrying a crystal ball," Denham said. He looked at the girl through narrowed lids. Desire for her was like a sudden physical pain in him, and he did not want the girl to see what he knew was showing in his eyes. Her perfume rose at him, stronger than the smell of the stuff in his glass. An instinct of caution stirred in him, and he opened his eyes and let them dwell insolently on her white breasts where they swelled up against the almost transparent silk of her dress. "I'd say you were carrying a crystal," he drawled, "only I don't know where you'd pack it, dressed as you are." *Keep away from this, Denham*, the voice of wary and prudent instinct told him, *keep the hell out of this, for your own good.*

"I could perhaps give you employment," the tall man said briskly. "As a companion who doubles in brass as a bodyguard. I'm sick of having thugs look after me. If Audrey says you'll do, I'll take her word for it. I'll pay sixty a week, and board and room, providing, of course, that you can give me proper references."

Denham took a sip of whisky, wondering if a blind man turned his sightless eyes towards another person's face. The dark glasses were

opaque circles that told him nothing, round patches of blankness gleaming against Ganns' pale skin. Denham thought of the two single bills that remained in his wallet, of his stifling small room in Lafe Haskell's Second Avenue flat, and the instinct of caution died. "I could maybe give you the name of a prison warden who knew me pretty well," he said deliberately, a bitter smile twisting his lips. "I was his guest for five years. Do you think you could use a reference like that, Mr. Ganns?"

Ganns' laughter was an almost soundless rustle, deep in his throat. "Why, yes," he said, "I think I could. As a matter of fact, that's exactly the sort of reference I want. Consider yourself hired."

The red-haired man, whose name was Marvin Burke, was drinking beer in Lafe Haskell's kitchen when Denham came in at one o'clock. He was stripped to the waist, and his red-furred shoulders had a bull-elephant bulk, sweating under the light of a single naked bulb that hung on a long cord from the ceiling of the room. When he saw Denham, the big man slammed a beer can down and bellowed.

"Easy, pal," Lafe Haskell said it gently. He was a small man, with a quiet dark face and restless black eyes, and he managed to appear dapper even in heat that lay about him like an evil mist.

"Easy, hell!" Marvin Burke said, rising until his red hair nearly

touched the suspended light bulb. "I tell this bastard Denham, to tap me a couple of times, light, and I agree I'll fake a fall, and make it look like he's the hero of the hour. So what does he do? He shoves his right half through my guts, and he cuts my lip with his left. Okay, so he had his fun, and now I'll have mine."

"You'll have your fun next New Year's Eve," Lafe Haskell said, mildly. "You lay a finger on him now, I'll have a ton of lard carved off your butt." The quick eyes darted to Denham's face, and the small man smiled. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, hitting poor Marvin so hard. He's a mess of muscles, but he can't take it in the belly. No man can take it in the belly when he lives mostly on pastrami and beer and breads."

"All right," Burke said, "all right. Maybe Denham's in on this deal now, but I'm not forgetting that poke in the guts. There'll be a day."

"Any time that suits you," Denham said, flicking the giant with a contemptuous glance. He turned to Haskell. "So Ganns hired me. So now you've got a plant in his house. His wife thought I might be as tough as I acted, and it seems the guy was fresh out of a bodyguard, so I'm the boy. And I think now you'd better fill me in on everything. I mean everything, too, Haskell, because I may be broke, and short on brains, but I won't buy a pig-in-the-poke."

Haskell fanned himself with the

newspaper and showed his white, even teeth in another smile. "I'll tell you how it is with this Wade Ganns, first," he said. "Before the guy lost his eyesight, he was an accountant — a tax expert who played advisor for a lot of big mobsters, and did very well for them at cheating Uncle Sam, and did very well for himself, too. And since he knew a lot of big racket boys the way he did, it was only natural that he got to know a lot of other high-shot thieves, too. Well, one of the guys he got to know was a jewel thief named Amby Ware."

"I've heard of Mr. Ware," Denham said. "Go ahead."

"I never waste a word," Lafe Haskell said. "A couple of years ago, Amby pulled the biggest caper of a big career. Heisted an old lady named Mrs. Mainwaring for a quarter of a million dollars worth of diamonds, pearls, and other assorted gew-gaws. The stuff was hot, hot like tonight is hot, so Amby Ware left the loot with Ganns until it had cooled off a little, and then he was going to come back and get the stuff, and give Ganns a split when it was fenced. But Ware didn't come back. Ware isn't ever coming back, matter of fact."

"Stiff?" Denham asked.

"Right. And Ware is deader than most, because he tangled with Rocco Mocus, out on the coast, and now Amby Ware is part of a concrete pier. So, Ganns is still holding the stuff, holding it until he knows the

heat is entirely off, because he can afford to, not being pressed for dough like the rest of us ordinary people. The pretty things are in Ganns' house, we know that. What we didn't know was just how to get them out."

"If I get in the house," Denham said in a matter-of-fact voice, "if I get in the house, we'll get them out."

"That's what I figure," Lafe Haskell said. "Ganns' place isn't just a house, really, it's a fort. Steel shutters and doors you can't get through unless you butt through 'em with a tank, or burn your way in with an acetylene torch. Everything — including the safe the jewels are in — is bugged up with burglar alarms; there isn't a room in the house hasn't got a buzzer in it will bring the cops. Besides which, there's a lot of guns."

"So Ganns can't see to shoot? So he's got a pistol permit, anyway, and if somebody tries, to crush in, there's nothing stopping him from handing a cannister to his body-guard. And *most* of the guys he's had were the sort of guys you couldn't bribe, a lot of square-John jerks would put the blast on their own mothers. You'll be a charming exception. Just as Red here was, only he was too stupid to figure some way of opening the safe."

Denham's face might have been carved from stone, but an uncontrollable flicker of surprise widened his pale eyes. "Red worked there as

a bodyguard?" he asked. "You didn't tell me that."

"I'm telling you now," Haskell said. "Red was there for a month, until Ganns fired him for guzzling on the job. That's why we figured, if we staged this phony beef between you and Red, in the ginmill Ganns and his wife go to, and if they saw you work this big meatball over easy — or so it seemed — they might fall for our play. We knew Ganns has a couple private eyes watching his place, temporary, and we knew he'd be looking for a regular boy." The small man laughed. "So they fell for the corny routine, and now you're in."

"Like Red was in," Denham said softly. "Like Red was in, for a month. Why didn't you get the stuff while he was there?"

Haskell lit a cigarette, blew smoke into the sultry, ill-smelling darkness beyond the window-sill. "There were a lot of reasons. For one thing, Mrs. Ganns is the only one who can open the safe, by combination, now that Ganns can't see. And here's something else: the safe's a special job, built into the wall, and there's a heavy steel door on the outside of it, a door that unlocks with a key. So far as we know, Ganns is the only one has got a key to that door. Even if we could've got in and — uh — induced Mrs. Ganns to open the pete, that locked door still would have been a problem — the first problem."

Denham smiled faintly. "You

trying to give me a snow job?" he asked. "You'd have had to slap the broad around a little to make her open the jug. Don't tell me a little thing like that would upset you."

The small man arched his neat black eyebrows. "Why, Denham," he said, "you keep on making cracks like that, I'll think you're a funny man. Matter of fact, we thought of that, too. Like we thought of a lot of other things, like pulling the main light switch, and cracking the pete by flashlight, like oldtime yeggs."

Haskell blew smoke through his nose, and smothered a yawn. "Only Ganns' burglar alarms aren't on the circuit that lights the house," he went on pleasantly, "they're on a circuit connected somewhere else. And as far as pushing them around, we had to consider the fact that there were three servants — a cook, a maid, and a butler — in the house. Unless we'd brought a mob with us as big as an army, somebody would have rumbled."

"There's only the maid in the house nights now," Burke's heavy voice said. "Ganns fired the butler — savin' on expenses, I guess — and the cook sleeps out. We figure, when you leave us in, I'll take care of the maid."

"She might even like it," Lafe Haskell said. He looked at Denham with sharp, bright eyes. "So it's all set, kid, as soon as you get in. And, incidentally, unless you just aren't in a mood for talking, you might tell us when that's going to be?"

Denham's hard mouth twisted into a mirthless grin. "A couple of days, maybe," he said. "As soon as he checks my references. Ganns is writing to an old friend of mine, to see if I'm a guy who can really handle himself in a jam."

Lafe Haskell stood in the center of the large, dark-panelled room, a squat automatic pistol held almost carelessly in his right hand. The small man's swarthy face was expressionless, and lowered lids drooped like hoods over his lively eyes. "If nobody tries anything funny, nobody gets hurt," he said, and he spoke in the patient tone a parent might use in speaking to a child.

Across the room, Wade Ganns sat motionless in a tall carved chair, the lenses of his dark glasses like small pools of black liquid, trapped in bony eye-sockets that seemed to have sunken deeper into his gaunt white face. A few feet from her husband, Audrey Ganns sat on a sofa, her hands resting quietly in her lap. The girl's face was as impassive as Haskell's, but Denham, standing beside the sofa, could hear the excited rustle of her breathing, and see the sudden sweat that ran off curved shoulders gleaming whitely above her strapless evening gown.

Lafe Haskell opened his mouth to speak again, and Burke came shambling into the room, moving noiselessly for all his bulk. "The maid's okay," he said to Haskell,

his slate-blue eyes on Audrey Ganns. "All I did was slap her around a little, an' make her swallow a little paraldehyde, and then I held her on the bed until she corked off. I tied her up, but not too tight. She'll be just as good as she ever was tomorrow, except for maybe some rope-burns, and a big head."

"Good boy, pal," Lafe Haskell said, then swung his gaze from Wade Ganns to his wife, and back to the man again. "I guess both of you know what we want. We want the stuff quick, and without any trouble if possible, but if we have to get mean, we'll get meaner than hell. I'll give you about ten seconds to tell us where the key to the outside door of the safe is, Ganns. If you don't tell, Mama loses her clothes. If you don't tell then, Mama loses some hide."

The big room was air-conditioned, but Denham felt a sudden chill throughout his arms and legs. Fear clawed at him, fear and nausea that constricted his belly as though cold strings were pulling his stomach into a tight knot. He heard a voice that he could not control, rising in a rumbling roar in his throat, and his voice was a shout that echoed in his own ears.

"No!" he yelled, and let a reassuring hand fall upon Audrey Ganns' shoulder. The touch of the firm flesh gave him the same feeling of hunger and ecstasy and wild exhilaration he had experienced when, on his first night in the Ganns'

household, the blind man's wife had invited him into her darkened room. It was a hunger and a madness that he had not surfeited in the three nights that had followed, and Denham knew that no matter how badly he wanted a share of what the safe contained, he could not see her stripped and outraged.

"No, what?" Lafe Haskell asked in an almost polite tone. "Don't tell me you want out at this point, Denham? Don't tell me you're figuring on getting off here?"

"No," Denham said hoarsely. "I let you and Red in, didn't I? I'm playing out the string. But you don't have to push this girl around. She'll open the pete for you, she's no goddamn fool."

The girl shrugged Denham's arm off her shoulder, looked up at him with a cool and contemptuous smile. "You're damned right I'll open it," she said. "Do you think I'd let anyone hurt me so that Wade could keep Amby Ware's loot?" She turned away from Denham and fixed Haskell with a level stare. "Go ahead, Mister, go after the key. I'd like to see how much the old boy will take, before he coughs it up."

"There's no need for anything like that," Wade Ganns said in his dry and precise voice. A small metal object gleamed in the lamplight; a key made a thin clatter, tinkling down on the polished floor at Lafe Haskell's feet. "I always carry the thing in my pocket," Wade Ganns said. "Where I can get at it quickly,

if a situation such as this should arise."

"You're a real sensible guy," Lafe Haskell said, flashing his white-toothed smile. He gestured with his gun at the key, spoke to Burke. "Pick it up, Burke, and unlock the jug. Get that door open, Pal, so that Mama can help us take Papa for a fall."

Burke lumbered over, stooped down and picked up the key. His thick fingers closed on the metal and formed a fist, and as he arose he drove the fist suddenly against the point of Lafe Haskell's jaw. The small man's head went back until the skin of his throat showed pale under his tilted chin, and Burke clubbed another blow down on his upturned face. Haskell turned around, a human top spun by violent force, whirled across ten feet of floor, and crashed head first into a wall. The gun clattered and slid on the polished floor, and Haskell lay very still, with his head wry-twisted on his thin neck, and a great crimson stain spreading across his crumpled face.

Denham stood like a man deep in slumber, staring in stupefaction as Audrey Ganns raced to the gun, snatched the weapon up, swung it in an arc that halted when the gun was levelled at his head. "Fine!" the girl said. "Now take care of Denham! Belt him out, too, and we'll get the stuff and blow."

"Yeah," Burke said in a whisper that grew into a snarling shout of

rage. "Yeah, him too!" Denham saw the big man coming for him, saw the gleam of sadistic madness in the blue eyes, raised a forearm just in time to block a blow that seemed to strike with the force of a padded maul. "Hitting a guy when you was supposed to be faking," Burke growled, and swung again. "Hitting a guy in the guts, making yourself look big for a broad!"

Denham stepped away, moving fast, and drove a hard right to Burke's fleshy jaw. The big man grunted and came on, swinging wildly, and Denham danced inside the flailing arms and ripped at Burke's fat belly with both hands. He heard the girl scream, somewhere beyond the narrow fluid circle of furious action in which he moved, and heard his shirt rip like paper as Burke caught him in a bone-crushing clinch. The big man let out a slobbering moan as Denham jerked a knee up into his groin, butted him in the face, broke away from the terrible hands.

Denham knew that he was fighting for his life against the giant's berserk strength; and knowing it, he fought with cold savagery, using all the precise and calculated skill he had acquired in hobo jungles and mining camp saloons. He forgot the girl and her treachery, and the levelled gun, and he lived only to tear to pieces the hulking figure that loomed before him. He went down once, hammered to the floor by a storm of clumsy blows; went down

and rolled away from feet that kicked at him in impotent rage, rose through a thundering darkness and fought by blind instinct until his head had cleared. He saw Burke's face, bloody and broken, a lopsided crimson pulp, and he stabbed at the nightmare face with a left hand, and threw a right that had all of his weight behind it. The giant fell with a crash that shook the room, and let out a whimpering cry of pain, and then lay still.

Denham stood panting over the fallen man and looked at the girl. "I guess they didn't know I could punch when they picked me up, you didn't know it either, sister."

Audrey Ganns' lips were parted, and her eyes were bright with excitement, but she held the pistol pointed at his head. "I didn't know," she said. "I didn't know you were that much of a man. If I had known, things might have been different." Her lips twitched into a sardonic smile. "I think, though, that perhaps you're a little too much of a man for me to handle. I guess Burke's out of it, now, thanks to you, so I'll just play it alone. Get over there and face the wall, Denham, and put your hands up—high!"

"Put the gun down," Denham said. "Put it down and open the safe, and I'll take my share of the stuff, and go. In some ways you're too much of a woman for me, too, baby."

"I don't want to kill you,"

Audrey Ganns said. "But you're just another guy, Denham, and there are lots of guys."

"You must have known most of them," Denham said in a weary voice, and took a long step towards the girl. She fired at him, and missed, and a second shot roared from across the room, like an echo of the first. Audrey Ganns screamed once and half turned, and then fell upon a white rug that reddened beneath her as her threshing body ceased to move. Denham turned and saw Wade Ganns rising from the carved chair, a pistol in his hand. Light gleamed dully on the dark glasses as the tall man walked unerringly across the room and stood over the body of his wife.

"I'm not blind," Ganns said quietly, and his voice sounded cool and infinitely detached, as though the tall man spoke of things that concerned him not at all. "That is, I'm not blind any more. I had an infection that took away my sight, but I've been getting better for months."

"She didn't know?" Denham asked, and his voice sounded faint and far away, the voice of a stranger rising in his own throat.

"I never told her," Ganns said. "I knew she was stealing from me, two-timing me with every man she found, but at first I couldn't make myself believe it. And then — well, my sight began to return, and I had a chance to see for myself. Maybe I've got masochistic tendencies, but

anyway I wanted to see. And that's how I know that Audrey took Amby Ware's jewels out of the safe, piece by piece, and replaced them with worthless imitations."

"Imitations?" Denham asked, and his voice was a hollow croak, like the voice of an old man.

"The jewelry in the safe is quite worthless," Ganns said, "but there's a box in the back of the safe filled with something of great value. Raw heroin — perhaps a half million dollars worth of the stuff. Audrey had Burke buying it for her for a long time, and she'd been hoarding it here, waiting for a short market to boost up the price. I guess they'd decided that the market was short enough; tonight was to have been the night that they walked out with the stuff. I suppose she'd have gotten rid of Burke later, but she needed him for the present. You and the other man, of course, didn't mean a damn."

The pistol in the tall man's hand rose suddenly and Denham stared into the muzzle of the levelled weapon.

"I think I'd better call the police now," the remote voice said. "I'd like to let you go, Denham, but it's impossible; I need you as a witness. And after all, I shot Audrey to save your life."

"You don't need me," Denham said quickly, and his eyes were sharp with self interest, and now he felt neither horror or regret when he looked at the girl's body. "Burke

will spill his guts, tell the Narcotics boys that he and your wife were big dealers in the stuff. They'll make him tell where he got it, and they'll get the stuff in the safe; they'll feel so good they'll want to make you a member of the department. You'll be sitting so pretty they'll see that you only get tapped on the wrist for receiving stolen goods."

"I'm sorry," Wade Ganns said. "I'll need you, too, Denham. I burned alive, figuratively, over Audrey for years; I'm taking no chances of frying for her, literally, now. And I'll tell you something else! I never was an overly-scrupulous man, but I've always hated dope, and those who trafficked in it. I had a sister die from using it, and I hate the stuff worse than anything in this world."

"Nobody'll blame you for that," Denham said, staring warily at the tall man's face.

"Well, then," Ganns said, "you

ought to be glad to help smash a dope ring, in any way you can help. Especially with your record. You see, I telephoned the warden of that federal pen where you did time, and he told me all about you. You were a middleweight pug who might have become a champion. But the money didn't roll in fast enough, so you took to pushing junk — to kids."

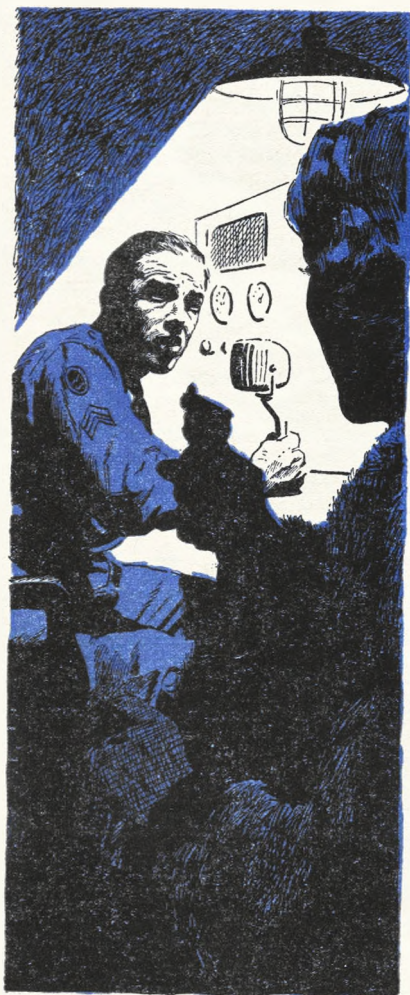
"I did my time for that," Denham said harshly, "I did my time."

"Can you ever do enough?" Wade Ganns asked, and smiled his pale smile.

He moved back, holding the gun on Denham, until his free hand touched a push-button set in the dark-panelled wall.

Denham took a step towards him, then stopped and lifted his heavy shoulders in a shrug, and stood looking at the muzzle of the gun as a burglar alarm broke into a clattering metallic roar, like weird music vibrating throughout the silent house.





Graveyard Shift

DOZING in front of the microphone in the radio dispatcher's office, Joe Crestone blinked groggily when one of the heavy side doors downstairs whushed open and then started rocking back to center. Since midnight the building had been dead still.

The footsteps swung out briskly

It was a fantastic stunt, but it was working. The girl was using the police to make sure that this robbery was successful.

BY STEVE FRAZEE

# 900	CODE SHIFT : OFFICIAL	1/21/53
CODE	DESCRIPTION	
10-1	Receiving poorly	
10-4	Okay	
10-6	Busy	
10-10	Temporarily out of service	
10-19	Report back to this office	
10-20	Where are you?	
10-28	Registration	
10-47	Possible drunk	
10-98	Assignment completed	
Code 4	Hit and run	
Code 9	Disturbance	

on the tiles of the lobby. They made quick taps on the steel steps leading up towards the dispatcher's room. Crestone was wide awake. The clock on the radio reeled up another minute. It was 2:17. He swung his chair to face the counter.

She was close to six feet. Her hair was dark, her eyes soft brown. She wore a fur jacket and under that a green woolen dress caught high at her neck with a silver clasp. Her smile was timid. "I — I thought Mr. Walters would be here again." She studied the work schedule of the Midway police department on the board.

"He's got the flu. It was my day off so I'm sitting in for him."

"I see." She stared at the maps on the wall. "I — I just don't know exactly how to start it."

She was white and scared. Crestone let her make up her mind. On the model side, he thought, the kind who pose in two thousand dollar dresses. Plenty of neck above the silver clasp, more gauntness in her face than he had observed at first.

"Hit and run deal?" he asked, eyeing her sharply.

Before she could answer, state patrol car 55 checked in from Middleton, eighteen miles north on Highway 315. A woman dispatcher in Steel City read a CAA flight plan to Bristol for relay to Cosslett. Webster came in with a pickup-and-hold on a 1949 blue Chev with three men. Crestone sent out the information on the pickup-and-hold.

When he swung to the log sheet in the typewriter at his left, she asked, "Do the state cars patrol the old highway from the boarded-up brick works east toward Steel City?"

"State 7? No, not unless there's a crash out there." He wrote a line on the log. "Did you have a wreck?"

She hesitated. "In a way."

He turned back to the desk and pulled a pad to him. "Name?"

"Judith Barrows."

"Address?"

When she did not answer he twisted his head to look at her. He looked into a snub-nosed .38. For one fractured moment the bore was big enough to shoot a golf ball. Crestone sucked in his breath.

"Give me the log sheet," she said. "Don't even brush your arm near the mike or you'll get it in the liver."

He stripped the log sheet from the machine and put it up on the counter. She drew it to her with long, thin fingers that bent into carmine-tipped hooks. "Now, a copy of the code sheet, and not the old one with blanks behind some of the numbers."

Crestone took a code sheet from a folder. When he put it on the counter he saw that she had shrugged out of her fur jacket. He heard the power hum and then Bud Moore said in his bored after-midnight voice, "Seven fifty." Crestone started to reach toward the microphone and then he stopped.

"Acknowledge it," she said softly.

He stared at the .38. She was resting her hand on the counter. The gun looked down at his mid-section. He gripped the long bar of the mike switch on the stem of the instrument. Under *Transmit* on the face of the radio a purple button lit up like an evil eye glaring at him. "Seven fifty," he said, then automatically released his grip on the switch.

"Going 10-10 at Circle 7365," Moore said, which meant that he and Jerry Windoff were going out of service temporarily to get a cup of coffee at the Mowhawk Diner out on Sterling Pike.

Crestone's mind froze on 10-19: *report back to this office*. But then she would read it on the code sheet and — His head rocked sidewise. His left elbow jammed against the typewriter. There was a thin crack of tension in her voice when she said, "Answer the car, Buster."

He was still half stunned from the crack on his head when he said, "Seven fifty, 10-4." *Okay, 750.*

"Give me the local code sheet now, Crestone."

He gave that to her. It held sixteen messages for local use, and then there were four blanks. She said, "Don't get any ideas about using Code 17 or any other blank."

Code 17 was unlisted, strictly a private deal between Bill Walters and all cruiser cops: *bring me a hamburger and a jug of coffee*. She had found out plenty from old Bill, a

friendly, trusting guy who liked to talk about his work.

"Face the radio, Crestone. Don't worry about me."

He turned around, staring at a transmitter which controlled all law enforcement in the area. It was worthless unless he had the brains and guts to figure out something.

"Where's state patrol 54?" she asked.

"After a 10-47 on State 219." It was on the log; there was no use to lie. He heard papers rustle.

"That's right," she said. "Chasing a possible drunk. Keep everything you say right, Crestone, especially when you talk into that microphone."

The right-hand reel of the clock put up three more minutes. Now it was 2:25. She made no sound behind him. After another minute he could not stand it any longer. He had to look around. She was still there. The gun was still there too, slanted over the edge of the counter.

"Face the radio."

He hesitated, and then while he was turning, the gun bounced off his head again. He sucked air between his teeth and cursed. For a tick of time his anger was almost enough to make him try to lunge up and reach her; but his sanity was greater. She struck him again, sweeping the barrel of the gun on the slope of his skull.

"Don't curse me!" she said.

After a foggy interval Crestone was aware of the messages coming

from both channels. Two stolen cars from Bristol. He added them to a list of twenty others stolen that day. Steel City sent a car to investigate a prowler complaint. Seventy miles away state patrol car 86 stopped to pull a dead pig off the highway. The dispatcher in Shannon sent a car to a disturbance at Puddler's Casino. York asked Webster for a weather report on Highway 27.

Then there was just the hum of the radio and the silence at his back. Where was it, one of the banks? No, blowing vaults was a worn-out racket. A payroll at one of the mills or at the automobile assembling plant? Wrong time of week. Besides, that stuff went from the banks by armored cars in daytime.

At the other end of the narrow slot where he was trapped there was a desk, a big steel filing cabinet, and a rack with four sawed-off shotguns. The shells were in a drawer in the bottom of the rack. In another steel cabinet that he could almost reach with his right hand were five pistols and enough ammunition to last a year.

The whole works was as useless now as the radio.

Car 54 asked Shannon for an ambulance at the cloverleaf on State 219. "Two dead, two injured. Didn't catch up with the *dk* soon enough."

"What's *dk*?" Judith Barrows asked quickly.

"Drunk." Crestone's head was

aching. "Car 54 will be back here in about an hour. He'll come in to write a report." That was not so, but Crestone wanted to judge her reaction to the time. He leaned toward the radio and twisted his neck to look at her. The one-hour statement had not bothered her.

When he straightened up, he ducked quickly. She laughed. When he raised his head again the gun banged against it. He rolled his head, grinding curses under his breath.

Car 751 came in. Sam Kurowski said, "Any traffic? We've been out of the car a few minutes."

"Where are they?" the woman asked.

Crestone pressed the mike switch. "10-20, 751?"

"Alley between Franklin and Madison on Tenth Avenue."

When the transmitting light was off she said, "Code 6 them to the corner — the southeast corner — of River and Pitt."

Code 6 was boy trouble, kids yelling, throwing rocks — any of a hundred things. They could spot a cruiser a mile away. When Kurowski and Corky Gunselman got way out north on River and Pitt and found nothing, they would think nothing of it. Crestone followed the woman's orders.

Car 752 came alive. Dewey Purcell said, "Going east on Washington at Sixth Street after *dk*. Give me a 10-28 on K6532."

That does it, Crestone thought.

Purcell was hell on drunken drivers. He and Old McGlone would be coming in with a prisoner in about five minutes.

"Give him the registration he asked for, Crestone."

He pulled the vehicle registration book to him. *K6532, 1953 Cadillac cpe., maroon, J. J. Britton, 60 Parkway.* Jimmy Britton, the Hill itself. Damnation! You didn't dump guys like him in the tank overnight; but he took hope from knowing that Purcell was in 752 tonight.

"Give him the 10-28, Buster."

"When they stop. Old McGlone can hardly write, let alone in a car doing eighty after a stinking *dk*."

Purcell called again from Washington and Trinity. "We got him." A woman's shrill voice came from the background before the car mike was closed. Crestone gave Purcell the registration information.

Crestone stared at the radio. Jimmy Britton would be drunk, affable, mildly surprised at being picked up. Among other things, when he fumbled out his driver's license, he would show his honorary membership in the Midway Police Department. Old McGlone would say, "Ah now, Dewey, let's take the lad home, shall we? No harm's been done, has it?"

But Purcell was tough and he did not give a damn for the social register and he hated drunken drivers. Crestone had been the same way too, and now he was working for a year as a dispatcher.

It was Old McGlone who spoke the next time. "We'll be going up the hill now to 60 Parkway."

No lucky breaks tonight, Crestone thought. Tomorrow he would think of a dozen things he could have done, and every man out there in the cars would do the same. That was tomorrow. The gun was behind him now. She could reach him when he swung, and she could not miss if she shot.

There was a drawer in the desk full of stories of tough private-eyes who took bushels of guns away from dames clad in almost nothing, and then slapped them all over the joint or made love to them. Joe Crestone sighed. His head was aching brutally. He did not feel like taking any guns away from any dames.

Car 750 came back into service. Moore and Windoff had drunk their coffee. Then 752 went out of service temporarily at the Sunset Drive Inn. Crestone knew how Purcell was feeling now, the to-hell-with-it attitude. Old McGlone would be telling him, "There's some things, Dewey boy, that you've got to learn about being a cop." Old McGlone knew them all.

Car 751 signalled arrival at River and Pitt. A few minutes later Kurowski said, "10-98." *Assignment completed.* There was no use to elaborate on nothing.

Judith Barrows said, "Send 751 to the Silver Moon on Oldtown Pike to look for a '49 green Ford sedan with front-end damage."

Crestone obeyed. He studied the map. She wanted 751 north and east all the time. Then where in the southern or southeastern part of Midway was any heavy money? There was a brawl at the Riverview country club tonight, maybe a few thousand loose in pockets and a handful of jewelry, but —

The phone at Crestone's elbow and the extension on the desk near the big filing cabinet spilled sound all over the room.

"Don't touch it until I say so!" the woman said.

She went around the counter and backed into the chair at the other desk. She crossed her legs and steadied the .38 on her knee. She raised the phone and nodded.

"Police station, radio dispatcher," Crestone said.

"Ten cents, please," the operator said.

Crestone heard the pay phone clear. A man asked, "You got a report on State 312?"

"Just a minute." Crestone had never heard of 312.

"Just tell him it's all clear, Buster." Judith Barrows was holding the mouthpiece against her thigh.

"All clear." Crestone held on to hear a jukebox, the clatter of a cafe — anything to help position the call. The man hung up. A booth, Crestone thought. He put his phone down, staring at the woman's legs. They were beautiful. He did not give a damn. She got up carefully, standing for a moment in a hip-out-

of-joint posture. A model, he thought. It was in her walk too when she went around the counter again.

So they knew this end of it was set now. Where was the other end? Somewhere in the southern part of the district covered in normal patrol by Car 751. Anybody could read the red outlines on the map. It struck him then: the Wampum Club. Big business, cold and sure, with a fine patina of politeness, free drinks, free buffet and other incidentals for the regular suckers. The green-and-crackly on the line at Sonny Belmont's Wampum Club. Let the cops take Jimmy Britton home and tuck him in, but Belmont never took his check, drunk or otherwise.

The job would take at least four fast, tough men. Making Sonny's boys hold still for a deal like that was not for amateurs. There was a lot of dough around the Wampum; the income tax lads had been wondering how much for a long time.

So I think I've got it doped, and what good does it do? Belmont could stand the jolt. Why should men like Corky Gunselman and Sam Kurowski risk catching lead to protect money in a joint like the Wampum?

That was not the answer and Crestone knew it.

He looked at the last two stolen cars on the list. A '52 blue Mercury and a '53 green Hornet. That Hudson would go like hell and the Mer-

cury was not so slow either. Both cars stolen around midnight in Bristol. He wondered which one was outside right now. He could be way off, but he had to figure he was right.

Since the Hornet and the Merc were already aired as hot, they would probably be used only to make the run to another car stashed close. East was the natural route. Old State 7 was narrow and twisting, but the farmers who used it would all be sleeping now. Say a half hour to reach the web of highways around Steel City, and then road blocks would be no more than something to annoy whiz kids on their way home with the old man's crate. She had asked about State 7.

Car 751 came in. Kurowski said, "Nothing at the Silver Moon with front-end damage. What's the dope on it?"

"Code 4," Judith Barrows said. "The Ford was last seen going north on Pennsylvania at Third Avenue."

Code 4, *hit and run*. Crestone obeyed the .38.

Kurowski said, "10-4. We'll swing up that way."

She was keeping 751 north, sure enough. The phone exploded. Judith Barrows went around the counter again to the extension. She nodded.

From the background of a noisy party a man said, "Somebody swiped my car." A woman shouted, "Tell 'em it's even paid for!"

Crestone wrote down the information. A '52 cream Cadillac

sedan, R607, taken sometime between 12:30 A.M. and 1:30 A.M. "It was right in the damned driveway," the owner complained. "We're having a little party here and —"

"Keys in it?" Crestone asked.

"Sure! It was in my own driveway."

"We'll get on it right away." Crestone hung up.

The woman said, "You won't put *that* one out, Buster."

So he was guessing right. They had a cream Cad waiting. If they planned to use State 7, the quick run for the crew at the Wampum was up the county road past the country club and then on out Canal to where it intersected across the river with State 7 near the old brick plant. Barrows could shoot straight north on Meredith to Glencoe, turn east — Why hell, she would strike State 7 just a hundred yards from the old brick works. The Cad was waiting out there now!

She was behind him once more. As if she had read his thoughts she asked, "What's in your little round head now, Buster?"

"I'm wishing you'd beat it."

She laughed but there were little knots of tension in the sound. The deal must be on at the Wampum now. Before she left she would have to level him. She would swing lower and harder then. The thought made Crestone's headache worse. He hoped she knew the bones on the side of a man's skull couldn't take it like the thick sloping top. She might stretch

him so he never got up. He could smell his own sweat.

Before the clincher came he would have to run a test on her. The next time she was in the chair.

One of the side doors made a whushing sound and then a voice boomed across the lobby. "Hey there, Bill, how's the peace and dignity of the community?" It was old Fritz Hood on his way home from the power company's sub station. He always stopped to bellow at Bill Walters.

"Hello, Fritz!"

"You, Joey! Where's Bill tonight?"

"Sick."

"The old bastard! I'll go see him before he dies." The door rocked back to center. Hood was gone.

Judith Barrows was in the chair, with her jacket across her lap and the code sheets on the desk. Crestone rose slowly. The fur jacket slid away and showed the .38. Something dropped out of one of the jacket sleeves. He made another step. She tilted the muzzle, resting the edge of her hand on her knee. She cocked the gun then. Her face was white.

Crestone tried to talk himself into it; but he knew she was too scared. An excited or scared dame with a gun. Murder. He backed up and sat down. His head was pounding. On the floor at her feet lay a piece of doubled wire, the raw ends covered with white tape.

The phone sang like a rattlesnake.

The woman made a nervous stab at it before she gained control and nodded at Crestone. Mrs. John Slenko, 3648 Locust, had just seen a man in her back yard. She wanted the police.

Judith Barrows' vigilance wavered while she was fumbling her phone back into the cradle. Crestone used his phone to push the *Gain* dial of the radio down to *One* while he was putting the instrument away. He dispatched 750 to Mrs. Slenko's home.

The big dame was in a knot now and Crestone was coming out of it. She had grabbed at the phone because she was expecting a call to tell her that the job at the Wampum was done. She was staying in the chair to be near the phone.

When York and Shannon began to talk about a revoked driver's license, the sounds came faintly.

"What did you do to the radio!"

"Nothing."

The .38 was on his stomach. "What did you do?"

"Nothing, damn it! We get a split-phase power lag on the standby tower every night." He hoped she knew as little of radio as he did. "The reception fades, that's all."

"You're lying! You did something, didn't you?"

"No! You've been watching me every second."

"You're going to get it, Crestone, if anything goes wrong." She was wound-up but the gun was easy.

Car 752 came in, so faint that only

"seven-fift" was audible, but Crestone knew Purcell's voice and he could guess the message. Purcell had sulked in the Sunset Drive Inn, dwelling on the inequalities of traffic code enforcement, but now he and Old McGlone were on their way again.

The woman's voice was a whip crack. "What was it?"

"I'll have to get it on the other mike."

"What other mike?"

Crestone kept his finger close to his chest when he pointed. "On a hook around at the side of the radio."

The faint call came again.

"All right," Judith Barrows said.

There was dust on the curled lead of the hand mike. Crestone said, "Car 750, I read you 10-1. The standby trouble again, as usual." 10-1 meant: *receiving poorly*. From the corner of his eye he saw the woman grab the code sheet to check on him.

Car 750, which had not called, now tried to answer at the same time 752 came in. Crestone said, "Standby, 751. 10-6." *Busy*. Now he had them all confused. He called for a repeat from Car 750 to make it more confused. During the instant Judith Barrows was checking the code number he had used, he turned transmitting power to almost nothing.

Faint murmurs came from the radio as the three local cars asked questions Crestone could not hear.

The woman did not like her loss of contact. She got out of her chair. "Where's 751?" she demanded.

Into a dead mike Crestone asked the location of the car. He pretended to hear the answer from the receiver against his ear. "He's trailing a green Ford toward the Wam-yum Club."

"Get him away from there!" She was panicked for a moment and then she got hold of herself. She grabbed the local code sheet. "Code 9 him to the Silver Moon."

Code 9 was a disturbance. Crestone went through the pretense of calling 751. There was still enough flow of power to light the purple eye.

"Tell him to disregard the Ford," she ordered.

"10-22 previous assignment, 751. Code 9 at the Silver Moon."

When the next small scratch of sound came from the speaker, he said, "Midway, Car 55. Go ahead." He began to write as if he were taking a message: *'52 cream Cadillac sedan, R607, State 7 near old brick plant. Driver resisted arrest.*

She came out of her chair. "What's that message?"

"Car 55 just picked up a guy in a stolen car near the brick works."

It struck her like death. "Give me that paper!"

He tossed it toward her. She raked it in with her heel, and picked it up without taking her eyes off him. She read it at a glance and cursed.

The phone rang. She had it with-

out making her signal to Crestone. He lifted his receiver. A tense voice said, "All set here."

"No!" she cried. "The state patrol just got Brownie and the car!"

"You sure?"

"It just came in on the radio."

"The other way then. You're on your own, kid, till you know where." The man hung up.

Crestone said into the hand mike, "10-4, Car 750." He swung to face the woman when she went around the counter. "Car 750 is four blocks away, coming in."

She raised the gun. "They're coming in," he said. A man might have done it. She broke. It was her own safety now. Her heels made quick taps on the steel steps, a hard scurrying on the lobby tiles.

Crestone loaded the shotgun as he ran. The blue Mercury was at the first meter south of the police parking zone. She spun her wheels on the gutter ice and then the sedan lurched into the street. He put the muzzle on the right front window. Her face was a white blur turned toward him. He could not do it. He shot, instead, at the right rear tire and heard the shot rattle on the bumper.

He raced back to the radio and put the dials where they belonged. He poured it out then in crisp code. All cars, all stations. First, a '53 green Hudson sedan, K2066, possibly four men in car. Left Wampum Club, Midway, two minutes ago. Armed robbery. Dangerous. Sec-

ond, a '52 blue Mercury sedan, K3109, last seen going north on Meredith one minute ago, possibly shotgun marks on right rear fender.

The phone blasted. "This is Sonny Belmont, Bill. We've had some trouble down here. Four men in a late Hudson tudor, a light color. They cut toward town on Market. The license was a K2 — something."

"K2066, a green '53 Hornet, Belmont."

"Who is this?"

"Crestone. What'd they look like?"

Belmont's descriptions were sharp. "I slipped, Joey. They nailed me opening the safe."

"How much?"

"About eighty grand." Belmont said the amount reluctantly. It would be in the papers and he knew it. "How'd you boys get hot so quick, Joey?"

"Luck." Crestone hung up. Car 750 reported that a speeding Hornet sedan had outrun the cruiser and was headed north on 315. Crestone sent that information to all cars north of Midway.

Car 752 came in. "We're on the blue Mercury with the woman," Purcell said. "She's got a flat rear tire."

"She's got a .38 too," Crestone said.

Three minutes later Purcell called from Glencoe and Pitt. "We got her. Car 751 is here with us."

Crestone dispatched Car 751 to

the old brick works with the dope on a cream Cadillac sedan. Car 55 came in from Highway 315. "The green Hudson got past me, Midway. I'm turning now to go north. Tell Shannon."

The Shannon dispatcher said, "10-4 on that message, Midway." A moment later he was talking to a sheriff, and then state patrol 54 came in.

When the channels were clear again Crestone called Steel City to cover State 7 from the east, just in case. He called the police chief and the sheriff by telephone. The chief said he would be down at once. Crestone was still talking to the sheriff when Car 751 reported. "We got the cream Cadillac sedan at the brick plant," Kurowski said. "The guy scrambled into the weeds and took the keys with him."

The message went into the mouth-piece of the telephone. The sheriff said, "I'll be down there with a couple of boys in ten minutes." Crestone hung the phone up. He told Car 751 to stand by at the brick works.

Everything was set now. There would be a tough road block at the Y on State 20 and Highway 315. If the Hudson got around that, there would be trouble on ahead, piling up higher as more cars converged.

Crestone lit a cigarette. The phone rang. A man asked, "You got my car yet?"

"What car?"

"My Cadillac! My God, man! I just called you."

"The only stolen car in the world," Crestone said. "Yeah, we got it. You can pick it up at the police garage in the morning. Bring your registration and title and five bucks for towing charges."

"Towing! Is it hurt?"

"No keys."

"Oh," the man said. The party was still going on around him. "Look, officer, I've got an extra set of keys. If you'll send a car around —"

"Get it here in the morning."

"Okay then." The man hung up.

Crestone decided that his skull was breaking. He punched his cigarette out and tried to swallow the bad taste it had left in his mouth.

They brought her in, Purcell and Old McGlone. The tension was gone from her now; she looked beaten down and helpless.

"Cute kid." Purcell held up the .38. "She put a couple of spots on 752 by way of greeting us. Is the chief on his way?"

Crestone nodded. The woman looked at him and said, "I'm sorry I kept hitting you."

"Yeah."

"She was here?" Purcell asked. "She slugged you?"

"She did."

Old McGlone needed a shave as usual. He was staring at Judith Barrows. All at once he asked, "When did you leave Pulaski Avenue, Zelda Tuwin?"

Her eyes jerked up to Old McGlone's face. "Five years ago. It was raining."

"I remember you. You were a chubby kid, Zelda. You —"

"I was a big fat slob!"

"You been a dress model?" Crestone asked.

"Yeah! Big stuff! I got tired of parading in front of bitches and their men. I couldn't eat what I wanted to. I had to walk like I was made of glass. I got tired of it."

Old McGlone nodded. "Sure, sure. So you wanted to have the money like them you pranced in front of. You were doubtless making plenty yourself — for a kid from the Polish section of Midway. You'd have been better off staying on Pulaski and marrying a good boy from the mill, Zelda Tuwin."

Old McGlone looked sad and wistful. He never did want to believe the things he had been seeing for twenty-five years. He was tough but not hard. He understood and he deplored but he never could condemn. Zelda Tuwin watched him for several moments and seemed to recognize those things about him.

And then she stared at the floor.

The chief tramped in. Crestone gave him the story. The chief nodded, watching Zelda Tuwin. He tilted his head toward his office and clumped down the steps. Old McGlone and Purcell took her out, Purcell walking ahead. Old McGlone said, "Watch them steel steps there, Zelda."

After a while the sheriff's car came in. He had Brownie, who had tried to jump a canal and nearly drowned. Car 54 was on the air a moment later.

"We got the Hornet, Midway. Four men. What's the authority?"

"Midway PD. Bring 'em back, and everything they have with them."

"They got it too. Cars 55 and 86 are coming in with me."

Crestone sent out a cancellation on the two stolen cars. He could hear the chief talking to Zelda Tuwin downstairs. He knew how Old McGlone felt about some things there seemed to be no help for. It was 3:41 A.M.

Joe Crestone had a hell of a headache.



Probably over 100,000 guys named Freddie in New York.



Now Die In It

A Matt Cordell Novelette

BY EVAN HUNTER

I

HE woke me by shaking me and shouting my name, and I came out of sleep with a cocked fist, ready to smash his head open. The nightmare had been on me again, the dream in which Trina laughed at me, half-naked in Garth's arms, the dream that always ended the same way, with my .45 going back and down, again and again, against Garth's rotten face, and with Trina screaming over and over in the background. Only this time there was a new voice in the dream, and it shouted, "Matt, Matt Cordell!"

I jerked up violently, and I brought my fist back, and I felt strong hands close on my wrist.

"Matt, for God's sake, it's me. Rudy!"

I forced my eyes open, and I tasted the sour taste of wine on my tongue. I blinked in the semi-darkness of the room. There was a cot under me, and a blanket over me, and a gorilla sat on the edge of the cot, leaning over me. The gorilla's name was Rudy, and I remembered him vaguely as a guy I'd known long ago, a guy who lived somewhere in the Bronx.

I passed my hand over my face, trying to wipe away the sleep. I rubbed my bristled jaw, and then I reached for the pint of wine, took a long swallow, and asked, "What the hell is it, Rudy?"

"Boy, you're harder to find than a needle in a haystack."

"Maybe you haven't been trying the right places." We were in a two-bits-a-night flophouse in the Bowery, and I didn't imagine Rudy was well acquainted with this particular type of resort. "What's so important, Rudy?"

"We need your help, Matt. My wife told me to get a detective."

"Then why don't you get one? Is that why you woke me? Rudy, I ought to . . ."

"Matt, you're the only one I know. I came because you're the only one I know."

"Don't you read the papers, you stupid bastard?" I said. I uncapped the pint and took another swallow. "I don't own a license any more. The cops took it away when I beat up the guy I found with my wife." It was easy to talk about. It wasn't as easy to forget.

"I know all about that, Matt," Rudy said. I looked into the broad planes of his face, studying the large, broken nose, the deep brown eyes. There was something of sympathy in those eyes, but not much. I wasn't looking for sympathy, anyway. I just wanted to be left alone.

"Someone gave you a bum steer, Rudy," I said. "I haven't got a license any more. I'd appreciate it if you spread the word around. Now get the hell out and . . ."

"It's my wife's sister, Matt," he said, ignoring me. "The reason I came is she's pregnant."

"Good for her," I said.

"You don't follow, Matt. She's a

seventeen-year-old kid. Been living with us since my mother-in-law passed away. She ain't married, Matt."

"So? For Christ's sake, Rudy, what the hell do you want me to do about it?"

"My wife wants to find the guy who done it. Matt, she's been driving me nuts. The kid won't tell her, and she's beginning to swell up like a balloon. My wife wants to find him to make him do the right thing."

"What's her name?"

"My sister-in-law?"

"Yeah."

"Betty."

"And she won't tell who did it to her?"

"No, Matt. She's got a funny sense of loyalty or something, I guess. My wife's been after her ever since she found out about it, but she won't peep."

"What makes you think I can find the guy?"

"If anyone can, you can, Matt."

I shook my head. "Rudy, do me a favor. Go to a certified agency, will you? Get yourself a detective who can stand up straight."

"I'll tell you the truth, Matt, I can't afford it. I got two kids of my own, and another on the way. Help me, Matt, will you?"

"No! Goddamn it, I'm getting good and sick of this parade to my doorstep. I don't practise any more. Let's leave it at that. Go back home, Rudy. Forget you found me. Do that, will you?"

"It ain't so much for me, Matt. It's the wife. This thing is making a wreck of her. Matt, I never asked you for anything before, but this is something else. Believe me, if I didn't have to ask you . . ."

"All right, all right!" I shouted. I cursed and swung my legs over the side of the cot, reaching for my shoes on the floor. They were cold, and I cursed a little more, and when I finally had them laced, I asked, "You still driving a cab?"

"Yes," Rudy said.

"You got it with you?"

"Yes, Matt." He looked at me hopefully. "Are you going to help me? Are you going to help me, Matt?"

"Yeah, yeah, I'm going to help. I'm the craziest bastard alive, but I'll help you."

"Matt, thanks, you don't know what this will mean to the wife. I can't begin to . . ."

"Let's go," I said.

His cab was parked downstairs, and I smiled when I saw a few other winos look up in surprised shock as I stepped into it. He drove quickly, and he filled me in on a few more details as we headed for the Bronx. His wife, Madeline, had found out Betty was pregnant about a month ago. The kid was already three months gone by that time, and Madeline was frantic. Both she and Rudy talked to the girl, but they couldn't get anything out of her. They asked discreet questions around the neighborhood, but since

they didn't want the secret to get out, they had to be very careful — and their questioning had netted a big fat zero. They'd asked the kid to get rid of the baby, and she'd refused. And then they'd asked her to have it at a home where they'd take the baby off her hands as soon as it was born, and that drew a blank also. All the while, Betty refused to name the guy.

"That's a little strange, isn't it?" I asked Rudy.

"Sure," Rudy agreed. "But you know how these teen-agers are. Crazier'n hell."

"Is she pretty?"

"A knockout," Rudy said. "Blue eyes, black hair. Looks just the way my wife did when she was that age. You ever meet Madeline, Matt?"

"No."

"Well, she's changed a lot since I first married her. But the kid is a dead ringer for what she used to look like. You'll see."

"Does she have a lot of boy friends?"

"The usual. Neighborhood kids mostly."

"Did you talk to any of them?"

"A few. I couldn't tell them what I was after, though, so it was kind of tough."

"What kind of a crowd was she in? Fast?"

"I really don't know, Matt. She didn't talk about it much."

"Uh huh."

"You think you'll find the guy?"

"You haven't given me a hell of a lot to go on."

"That's all there is, Matt. Maybe Madeline can give you a little more. She talked to her more than me."

"We'll see," I said.

He pulled the cab up in front of an apartment house in the East Bronx. A few women were sitting on chairs in front of the house, and when Rudy got out of the cab, they nodded at him. When I got out, they stared at me distastefully, and then went back to their gossip.

We climbed four flights and then Rudy knocked on a painted brown door. The door opened wide, and a woman's voice reached us.

"What took you so long?" it said. The voice belonged to a woman of about twenty-eight, a few years younger than both Rudy and me. If Rudy hadn't told me she was expecting another child, I'd never have guessed. Her stomach bulged slightly, but she didn't have a prize-winning figure to begin with, and that could have been normal with her. She had black hair, and it was pulled to the back of her neck, tied there with a white ribbon. Her eyes were tired, very tired.

"Gee, honey," Rudy said, "I made it as fast as I could."

"You didn't make it fast enough," Madeline said tonelessly. "My sister's dead."

II

I was standing behind Rudy, so I couldn't see his face. He backed up a

few paces, though, and I could *imagine* what was on his face.

"D . . . d . . . dead?" he stammered. "Betty? Dead?"

It was silent in the hall for the space of a hearttick, and then I followed him into the apartment. The furniture was old, but the place was neat and well-kept. Rudy buried his face in his hands, and Madeline sat in a chair opposite him. There were no tears on her face.

"Was it a suicide?" I asked her.

"No," she said. "The police called about ten minutes ago. They found her in Yonkers. She . . . her head had been crushed with . . . with a blunt instrument, they said."

Rudy suddenly raised his head. "This is Matt Cordell, Madeline. Matt, this is my wife."

She mumbled, "How do you do," and I nodded, and then a silence invaded the room. Madeline looked at me for a long time, and finally said, "I still want you to find him, Mr. Cordell."

"Well, the police will probably . . ."

"I want *you* to find him. I want you to find him and beat him black and blue, and then you can turn him over to the police. I'll pay you, Mr. Cordell." She stood up abruptly and walked into the kitchen, and I heard her moving things on the pantry shelf. When she came back, she was holding a wad of bills in her hand.

"We were saving this for a car," she said. "I'll give it to you. All of

it. Just find the one who did this to Betty. Just find him and make him sorry. Cripple him if you have to. Find him, Mr. Cordell." She paused and thrust the bills at me. "Here."

"Keep the money," I said. "I'll look for him, but if I find him, he goes straight to the police."

"What's the use, Matt?" Rudy asked. "Madeline, he said the police would find the guy."

Madeline shook her head. "No, Rudy. I want to make sure. Will you look for him, Mr. Cordell?"

"I'll look for him."

"I'll pay you," she said. "Every cent we've got. Just find him." Her lower lip began to tremble, and then the tears started, the tears she'd been holding in check for a long time now. I walked into the hallway with Rudy, and I whispered, "Where'd she hang out? Who were some of these guys you questioned?"

"There's a cellar club off Burke Avenue. Lots of them in that neighborhood. This one is called *Club Dewdrop*. You know the kind. Bunch of teen-age kids fix up a basement and have dancing there, and meetings. She used to go to this one a lot, I think."

"Rough crowd?"

"I don't think so. Here, I'll give you the address." He fished in his wallet and came up with a scrap of paper. A bunch of numbers and a street name were scrawled on the paper with a ball point pen. I read the address, looked at it until I memorized it, and Rudy put it back

into his wallet. "They seemed like nice kids, Matt."

"Yeah," I said. "It takes a real nice kid to bash in a girl's head."

"Let me know how you make out, Matt."

"I will, Rudy. You'd better go back to your wife."

III

I found a bar on the way, and I had two drinks before I started looking for the address Rudy had given me. It turned out to be an all-brick private house, with a wide driveway that led to a garage in the back. The driveway was concrete all the way, and the back yard had been filled in with concrete, too. There was a door set at street level in the back of the house, and the club artist had painted a sign that read "*Club Dewdrop*." I looked at the sign, and then knocked on the door.

"It's open," a young voice said.

I pushed the door wide, and took a step down into the basement. The kids had done a nice job. The ceiling was covered with canvas that had been painted blue and sprinkled with dime store stars, effectively covering the pipes underneath it. The lolly columns supporting the house had been boxed in with knotty pine boards, and tiny shaded light bulbs had been set into the planks. The girls in the club had sewn curtains for the windows, and flanking each window were two thin columns of fluorescent lights, care-

fully shaded with skillful carpentry to give a subdued effect. It was very nice.

There were easy chairs scattered around the highly polished, asphalt-tile floor, and a record player rested on a table against one wall. A kid stood by the player now, a record in his hands, and when I came in, he turned to look me over.

"Hello," I said.

I guess I scared him. I hadn't shaved in four days, and a steady diet of wine can leave a man looking like something from Mars. I'd also been sleeping in my clothes for the past two weeks, and that didn't help to make me look like Adolph Menjou.

"What do you want?" he asked, in a high voice. He couldn't have been more than eighteen, but he was huskily built and nicely dressed. He jerked his head over his shoulder, glancing toward a doorway that led to a smaller room. I followed his eyes, saw a bar and a few more easy chairs in the smaller room. There was a closed door on one wall, and a sign declared it to be "John."

"I'm a friend of Betty's," I said.

"Betty who?"

I dug in my memory for the name Rudy had given me on the ride up to the Bronx. "Betty Richards. Do you know her?"

"No." He glanced over his shoulder again, and I began to suspect that a buddy of his was in the john. "What about her?"

"That's what I wanted to ask."

"I don't really know her."

The flush sounded behind the closed door, and it opened in a few minutes when a big kid in a corduroy sports jacket stepped through. He was blond, with a freckle-spattered nose and shoulders that came from weight-lifting. He stared at me curiously, looked at himself in the mirror over the bar, and then came into the larger room.

"Who's this, Bob?" he asked the other kid.

"He's looking for Betty Richards," the kid called Bob said.

"Yeah?"

"Not exactly," I told him. "I want to know a few things about her."

"Yeah? What kind of things?"

"Who she dated, for example. When she came down here. Who she danced with most when she was here. Things like that."

"Why do you want to know?"

I was getting tired of playing footsie, so I said, "Because someone smashed her head in a little while ago. She's dead."

Bob dropped the record, and it hit the floor and shattered into a hundred flying pieces. He ducked down and began scooping up the pieces into a little pile, his hands trembling. The blond kid wet his lips and said, "I'm Frank Stone, president of the club. We don't want any trouble, mister."

"You won't get any. Just tell me what I want to know."

"She used to come down here,

but she never stayed long. She'd come in, have a few dances, maybe a beer, and then take off."

"You sure, Frank."

"I'm positive. Ain't that right, Bob?"

The other kid nodded from the floor. "That's right, mister. I never even danced with her once. She just came and went, that's all."

"She date any of the boys in the club?"

"No. Most of the guys have steady-ies who belong to the club, too. They couldn't date outside without having trouble."

"Did she ever come down here with anyone?"

Frank thought this over for a moment. "No. Never. She'd just come down, hang around a while, and then leave. Just like I told you."

"Did she ever say she had to meet anyone after she left?"

"No, not to me. She wouldn't tell something like that to a guy. Maybe she told one of the girls. I don't know."

Bob stood up, glancing down once at the pile of pieces at his feet. "What about Donna?" he asked.

Frank looked uneasy. "How would she know? Let's leave her out of it?"

"Who's Donna?" I asked.

"Just a girl," Frank answered.

"Was Betty a friend of hers?"

"Well, yeah, they talked sometimes. Listen, mister, can't we leave her out of this?"

"Why should we leave her out?"

"Well, she's an older girl. Twenty-three, you know? She . . . well, she comes down once in a while. Sometimes for the Friday night socials, but mostly . . . other times."

"Other times?"

"Well, yeah. Afternoons sometimes, and . . . other times, too." He looked very uncomfortable now, and I could imagine why Donna came down other times. I'd run into these nymphos before, these dames who haunted the cellar clubs.

"And Betty was friendly with her?"

"They just talked. Whenever Betty came down, they'd talk. Mister, do we have to bring her into this? If this should get into the papers our folks ain't going to like the idea of Donna coming down here. I mean, you know how it is."

"Sure, I know how it is."

"You'll leave her out of it?"

"No. Where can I find her?"

"Mister . . ."

"Look, Sonny, maybe you didn't understand me. Betty was killed. Murdered. Finding her murderer is a little more important than seeing that you've got a steady supply of . . ."

"All right, all right," he said reluctantly. "Get a pencil, Bob."

Bob went into the back room, and when he returned, he handed Frank a pencil and a sheet of paper. Frank scribbled some numbers on it and said, "It's the yellow apartment house on the corner. Apart-

ment 3C." He handed me the paper and added, "She'll probably be alone. Her mother is dead, and her father works."

"Thanks," I said.

Frank nodded, and I knew he was thinking the club had lost a good thing. I started for the door, and behind me I heard Frank whisper, "Why'd you have to open your goddamned mouth?"

I closed the door on Bob's whispered protestations.

IV

The card under the buzzer read *Donna Crane*. Beneath it, so that the mailman would know who was paying the bills, the name *Charles Crane* was lettered in ink. I pushed the buzzer and walked to the lobby door, waiting. Nothing happened, so I pushed the buzzer again, waited a few more minutes, and then pressed two buzzers at random, hoping one of them would be home. The door clicked open, and I started up the steps to the third floor. It was a nice apartment house, lower middle-class, with no hallway smells and no broken plaster. The floors were clean, and even the windows on each landing were freshly washed. I pulled up alongside 3C, and twisted the old-fashioned screw-type bell in the door. It rattled loudly, and when I'd waited for three minutes with no results, I twisted it again.

"Shake it, don't break it," a girl's voice said.

I waited until I heard footsteps

approaching the door, and then I passed my hand over my hair in an abortive attempt to make myself look a little more presentable.

The door swung wide, and the girl looked out at me curiously.

"Christ," she said, "did you get his number?"

"Whose number?" I asked.

"The guy who ran you over," she said.

"Very funny," I said. "You Donna Crane?"

"The same. If you're selling something, you need a shave."

"You knew Betty Richards," I said.

"Sure." Her eyes narrowed, and she said, "Hey, you're not . . . no, you couldn't be."

"Who?"

"Never mind. You coming in?" She grinned coyly. "The neighbors will talk."

She was blonde, blonde the way Trina had been. She wore a green sweater that had been knitted around her, and black shorts turned up far enough to exhibit the graceful curve of her thigh. Orchard Beach had provided her with a Bronx tan, but it didn't hide the ultra-sophistication of her face. She was Broadway on Burke Avenue, with all the glitter and all the tinsel — and I guess maybe the neighbors did talk a little about her.

"Are you or aren't you coming in, Pal?" she prompted.

I stepped into the apartment, and she closed the door behind me. The

blinds were still drawn, and the place had all the dim coolness of Grant's Tomb. I smelled coffee brewing in the kitchen as she led me into the living room. She sat opposite me and folded her long, tanned legs under her with practised ease. She propped one elbow on the sofa back, tilted her head and asked, "So now, what about Betty?"

"Just like that, huh? Don't care who I am, or anything."

"I know who you are."

"Oh."

"Sure. I read the papers. I saw the pictures. Take off the beard and some of the whiskey flab, and add Cordell to the Matt. The screwed shamus." I didn't answer, so she said, "I'm right, aren't I?"

"You're right," I said wearily.

"I thought they threw you in the jug or something."

"They dropped charges."

"Yeah, that's right," she said, nodding. "I remember now. The babe went to Mexico, didn't she?"

"Can it," I said.

Her eyes opened wide, and she thrust out her lower lip. "Didn't know you were still warm for her form, pal."

"I said can it!"

She shrugged, and her breasts bobbed beneath the tight sweater. "Son, if you don't like this brand of jive, you know where you can go, don't you?"

I stood up. "Listen . . ." I started to say to stop her.

"Nobody told you to marry a slut. You picked a dud, and you . . ."

I lashed out with my open hand, catching her on the side of her jaw. Her head reeled back, and her back arched. She scrambled off the couch, her eyes slitted. "Get the hell out of here," she said.

"Not until I ask a few questions."

"You got no right to ask questions. The cops took your license, pal."

I hit her again, and this time I enjoyed it. She fell back on the couch, came up nursing her jaw and swearing.

"What did you and Betty talk about?" I asked.

She stood up abruptly and started to walk toward the phone. I grabbed her wrist and swung her around, and she came up against me hard, her face inches from mine. She was rearing her head back to spit when I clamped my hand over her mouth. She wriggled, freed her mouth, and then bit down on my hand, her upper and lower teeth almost meeting in my flesh. I shoved her away from me, and she ran back at me, throwing herself at me like a wild-cat. But there was something more than anger in her eyes this time, something I recognized instantly, and something that explained her visits to the *Dewdrop*.

This time I grabbed her arm and twisted it behind her, and when she brought her head back, I mashed my lips down against hers.

She struggled for a moment, and then went limp in my arms. I lifted her and carried her to the sofa, her lips buried in my neck, her hands running over my back. I smelled coffee from the kitchen, and then there was only the smell of her hair and her body in my nostrils, and the sound of her ragged breathing in the cool, dim living room.

V

She was curled up like a contented cat, a cigarette glowing in her hand, relaxed against the cushions of the sofa. There was a pleased smile on her face, and some of the hardness had rubbed off, to leave only features that were nicely boned, young.

"You need a shave," she said.

"I know." I lit a cigarette, blew out a stream of smoke and asked, "Do we talk now?"

She closed her eyes briefly, still smiling. "Must we?"

"We must."

"Then talk, Matt."

"What did Betty have to say to you?"

"Why?"

"Because she's dead. Because someone was careless enough to dent her skull with something big and hard."

"Oh," she said. That was all. Just a small "oh," but her face had grown pale beneath its tan, and the rise and fall of her breasts told me she was breathing harder.

"You *did* talk? You and Betty?"

"Yes. Yes, we talked sometimes."

"What about?"

"Dead," she said. She tasted the word, and then repeated it. "Dead. A nice kid, too. Mixed up, but nice."

"Mixed up about what?"

"What are most seventeen year-old kids mixed up about? Love? Sex?" She shrugged. "The same thing."

"Not always. How was she mixed up?"

"This guy . . ."

"What guy?" I asked quickly.

"A guy she was going with. She'd sit and talk about him whenever I'd meet her at the club. She had it bad, all right."

"What was his name?"

"Freddie. That's what she called him. Freddie."

"Freddie what?"

"She never said. Just Freddie."

"Great. What did she say about him?"

"The usual. You know."

"I don't know."

Donna eyed me levelly. "You can be an irritating louse, you know?"

"Sure," I said. "Tell me what she told you about him."

"Well, she didn't want her family to know about him, for some reason. She used to meet him on the sneak. She'd go down to the *Dewdrop* as a blind, stay there a while, and then take off. She usually met him at about ten or so, I think."

"Did she tell you that?"

"Well, no. But she always left the

club at about that time. I figured . . ."

"Where'd she go when she left the club?"

"I never went with her."

"Did she tell you how she first happened to meet this guy? Where? When?"

"No."

"Did she tell you whether he was a kid or a grown-up? Ever mention his age?"

"No."

"What he did for a living?"

"No."

I ran a hand over my face. "That helps a lot." I sat there for a few seconds and then asked, "Anything to drink besides coffee here?"

"Coffee! Holy Jesus!" She untangled her tanned legs, and ran across the room, and I watched, knowing there was nothing but her under that sweater. I watched her go, noticing the curve of her legs and the firmness of her body, and then she was in the kitchen turning down the gas under the pot.

"Beer all right?" she asked.

"It'll do."

"This isn't Joe's Grill, pal," she said. I heard the refrigerator door open, and then heard the sound of a bottle being placed on the kitchen table. There were a few more kitchen sounds, and then the fizz of the beer as she took off the cap. When she came back into the living room, she was carrying the bottle in one hand, and a steaming cup of coffee balanced in the other hand.

She gave me the bottle and said, "If you want a glass, go get it. I've only got three hands."

"This'll be fine."

She curled up again, and I took a deep drag of the bottle while she sipped at the hot coffee, peering at me over the edge of the cup.

"Did she ever describe this Freddie?" I asked. I wiped my lips and held the bottle in my lap.

"Nope. I gathered he was from Squaresville, though."

"What makes you say that?"

"The questions she asked. A hip character wouldn't leave questions like that in a kid's head."

"What kind of questions?"

"Well, personal things."

"Like what? Honey, I'm not a dentist. Let's have less teeth-pulling."

"Don't get it in an uproar, Buster," she told me. She took an angry gulp of coffee, burning her tongue and shooting me a hot glare. "She asked me how to kiss, for instance."

"And you told her, of course. What else?"

"She asked me how to do . . . other things, too." She paused, waiting for my comment. When I made none, she added, "You know."

"In short," I said, "you think she was pretty innocent?"

"Innocent? Brother, she was the original fiddler who didn't know his bass from his oboe."

"Well," I said, "somebody taught her damned fast."

"How do you mean?"

"She was pregnant when she was killed."

"Oouch!" Donna Crane winced and then shook her head slowly. "It always happens to the innocent slobs, doesn't it? First time behind the plate, and they get beaned." She uncrossed her legs. "You think this Freddie . . ."

"Could be."

She put her coffee cup down and said, "I wish you luck. If he did it, I hope you get him." She glanced at her watch. "You'd better go now. The old man gets home early." I followed her into the foyer and paused with my hand on the door-knob. She reached up to touch my face and asked, "Do you ever shave?"

"Sometimes. Why?"

She shrugged, and her chest did things again. Then her lips were on mine, gently this time. My hands found the small of her back, and she pressed closer to me for an instant, drawing away almost immediately. "The old man," she said apologetically. "Take a shave sometime, Matt. And then come back."

I opened the door and stepped into the comparatively bright hallway, grinning back at her.

"Maybe I will, Donna. Maybe I will."

VI

Freddie.

Just a name. Juse one Freddie out of the thousands of Freddies in the

city, the millions of Freddie's in the world. Gather them all together, shuffle them, cut, and then pick a Freddie, any Freddie.

It was not a day for picking Freddie's.

There was a mild breeze on the air, and it searched my face and the open throat of my shirt. The streets were crowded with people seduced by Spring. They breathed deeply of her fragrance, flirted back at her, treated her like the mistress she was, the wanton who would grow old with Summer's heat and die with Autumn's first chill blast. The man with his hot dog cart stood in the gutter, and the sun-seekers crowded the sauerkraut pot, thronged the umbrella-topped stand. The high school girls ambled home with all the time in the world, with all their lives ahead of them, senior hats perched jauntily on their heads, young breasts thrusting at loose sweaters. The men stood around the candy stores, or the delicatessens, and they talked about the fights, or the coming baseball season, and they looked at silk-stockinged legs and wished for a stronger breeze.

Or they went about their jobs, delivering mail, washing windows, fixing cars, and they drew in deeply of the warm air and sighed a little. It was Spring for them, at last.

And one of them was Freddie.

And Freddie was just a name.

I walked along Burke Avenue, wondering how long it had been since I'd eaten a hot dog, since I'd

seen a baseball game, since I'd cared. A long time. A long, long time. And how long ago to seventeen? How many years, how many centuries?

What does a seventeen year old kid think like? Why does a seventeen year old hide a lover? Love at seventeen is something to scream from the rooftops. No more the girl, and not yet the woman — and love is a wonderland of dreamy records, and beach parties, and tender kisses, and silent hand clasps. It is not a thing to hide.

But Betty Richards hid her love, and her love was hidden behind the name of Freddie, and New York City is a big place.

So where?

Where?

I needed a drink. I needed one because I couldn't think straight any more. I was ready to find Rudy and say, "Pal, I'm lost. Me and eight million others all have Spring fever, only it shows more on me because I'm still in love with a bitch who done me wrong, like the song says, Rudy. So let's just drop it and forget it and let the cops do the work. Okay, Rudy? Okay, pal?"

But would a cop understand a kid with her first love? Would a cop give one good goddamn?

I cursed myself, and I had my drink, and then I started from the beginning again, and the beginning was *Club Dewdrop*.

I didn't go inside this time.

I walked to the back door, and

then started to retrace my steps up the concrete driveway toward the sidewalk. *Betty Richards had walked up this driveway on many a night. Ten o'clock, and Freddie waiting.* I reached the sidewalk.

A car? Would he pick her up in a car? Maybe. But not here. If Betty had gone to all this trouble to hide the guy, he certainly wouldn't pick her up outside the club. A few blocks away, then? Even that seemed like an unnecessary risk. A few miles away? A dozen miles away? Why not?

I turned left and started walking toward Burke. The side street was lined with private houses, and each house probably sported a teen-age cellar club all its own. They also sported fat women in housedresses who looked up when I passed and muttered about what the neighborhood was coming to. When I got to Burke Avenue, I looked right and left. A block down on my left, looming against the sky like a blackened monster, was the elevated structure. I turned and headed for it, walking past the dry cleaning shop, the delicatessen, the bakery, pausing at the newsstand on the corner, and then taking the steps up to the station. The change booth was set against one brown wall, facing the turnstiles. I walked over to it, waited for a man in a Homburg to change a dollar bill, and then peered through the bars at the attendant.

"Hello," I said. Behind me, the Homburg dropped a dime in the

turnstile, shoved his ample stomach against the thick wooden bar. The attendant looked up from a pulp magazine, squinted at me, and said, "Yeah?"

"How's your memory?" I asked.

He squinted at me again, and moved a stack of dimes over to his left where I couldn't see them or reach them. "Fine. How's yours?"

"You on nights?"

"Four to twelve, mister." He glanced at the big clock across from the change booth. "Came on ten minutes ago. What's it to you?"

The Homburg labored up the steps, and the attendant shot a glance his way, weighing his chances of getting help if he needed it.

"You're on at ten, then, I guess."

"Four to twelve," he repeated. "That means I'm on at ten. You want change, mister?"

"No."

"What *do* you want? You want me to call the cops? Is that what you want?"

"No. I want to know if you recall seeing a young girl come up to the station at about ten o'clock at night. Blue eyes, black hair. A very pretty young girl — about seventeen."

"How the hell should I know? Lots of pretty girls . . ."

"This one came up to the station a lot. And always at about ten o'clock." I was guessing now, and the guess may have been a bit wide, but I figured any rendezvous Betty may have had was probably a thing with a set time and a set place.

"Why do you want to know, mister?"

"The girl was killed. Her sister hired me to . . ."

"Jesus," he said. He squinched his eyes down tight, swallowed his Adam's apple and allowed it to bob up in his throat again. "Jesus."

"Do you remember?"

"Blue eyes," he said, "black hair. Seventeen."

"Yeah. If she came up at all, it would be at about ten — and it would be a steady thing."

"Oh, I know," he said. He said it so casually that I almost missed it.

"You've seen the girl?"

"Yeah. Sure, I know who you mean. A cute little kid. Always smiling. She came up with a five dollar bill one night, and I told her I couldn't change it for her." He indicated the sign stating he couldn't change bills larger than two dollars, and then went on. "She told me she was in a hurry and would I please, please change it for her." He shrugged. "What the hell, I'm a sucker for a pretty girl. Anyway, I been with the city twenty years now. I ain't gonna lose my job." He grinned. "I changed the bill for her."

"Did she go uptown or downtown?"

"Well now I don't know."

"Well think," I said.

"Let me see. Uptown, I think. No, no, it was downtown."

"Well, which the hell was it?"

"Downtown. Yes, it was."

"You're sure it was downtown?"

"I'm positive. She always went up them stairs on my right. That's downtown."

"That's great," I said. Downtown. From the end of the Bronx to God alone knew where. If she'd gone uptown, there may have been a chance. Burke Avenue was close to the end of the line. But downtown? Hell, that led anywhere, anywhere at all. I ran a weary hand over my face.

"She ever say anything to you? Outside of the five dollar bill episode, I mean?"

"Nope. Just always gave me a big smile. Then got her change and went over to the Downtown platform. Sometimes she didn't need change, of course. But she always gave me a nice smile."

"How many times a week would she come up here?"

"Two, three, I guess. Yep, that's right. Fridays and Saturdays mostly, and maybe once during the week. I don't remember which day." He nodded his head. "Yeah, I remember that little girl well. Killed, you say? That's a goddamned shame. Who'd want to do a thing like that?"

"That's just what I'd like to know," I said. "Well, thanks for your help."

"Not at all." He watched me for a few seconds as I walked away from the booth, and then he turned back to his magazine. I thought I heard him sigh, but when I looked back, his nose was buried behind a lurid cover, and he was doing his best to

forget that the platform was always Winter, even when it was Spring in the street.

VII

I went back to Rudy's place. It wasn't far from Burke Avenue, and I didn't mind the walk because it was such a nice day. I climbed the four flights and knocked on the painted brown door, and waited.

Rudy answered the door.

"Matt, come in, come in."

I walked into the apartment, looking around for Madeline, wondering if she'd gotten over the first shock of knowing her sister was dead. Rudy followed my glance and said, "She's in the bedroom. She's taking it kind of hard, Matt."

"You know any Freddie?" I asked.

"Who?"

"Freddie."

Rudy seemed to consider this for a moment. "No," he said slowly, "I don't think so. What's his last name?"

"All I've got is Freddie."

"Is it a lead, Matt? I mean, do you think this Freddie is the one who did it?"

"Maybe. You think Madeline would know him?"

"I don't know, Matt." He glanced at his watch hastily. "Gee, kid," he said, "I have to run. Driving a hack ain't no picnic, and I want to catch some of the commuters going to Pennsy."

I looked at the clock on the

kitchen wall. It was nearing four-thirty. "Will you get Madeline for me before you leave?"

"Sure. Just a minute."

He went into the bedroom, and I heard their muffled voices behind the closed door. It was very still in the living room. The sounds from the street climbed the brick facing of the building and sifted through the open windows. The breeze lifted the curtains silently. They hung on the air like restless spectres, falling and rising again. The bedroom door opened, and Madeline came out with Rudy's arm around her shoulders. Her eyes were red-rimmed, and her nose was raw from constant blowing.

"I have to run," Rudy said again. "I'll see you, Matt."

"Sure," I said. He pecked Madeline on the cheek and then walked to the door and left.

Madeline moved to the window, stood there motionless, looking down at the street below.

"Do you know a guy named Freddie?" I asked.

She didn't answer for a long time, and then she said, "What? I'm sorry, I didn't . . ."

"Freddie. Do you know anyone named Freddie? Did Betty have any friends by that name? Anybody?"

Madeline shook her head wearily. "No. No, I don't know anyone by that name. Why?"

I shrugged. "Nothing yet. Have you got a picture of Betty?"

"Yes. Someplace there's a picture."

"May I have it?"

"All right," she said dully. She left the room again, and I heard her rummaging around in the bedroom closet. The springs on the bed squeaked when she sat down. There were other sounds, leaves being turned, and then a gentle sobbing again. I heard her blow her nose, and I waited, and the clock on the kitchen wall threw minutes into the room. She came out at last, drying her eyes again, and handed me a small snapshot.

Rudy had been right. His sister-in-law was a knockout, a beautiful kid with a clean-scrubbed look of freshness about her.

"I'll bring it back," I said.

"All right." She nodded, walked over to the window again and stared out. She was still looking down at the street when I left, closing the door gently behind me.

The cop was waiting for me just outside the building. I saw him there, started to step around him, almost bumped into him as he moved into my path.

I lifted my head, and our eyes locked, and I didn't like what I saw.

"Excuse me," I said.

I started to go around him again when he clamped a big paw on my shoulder. "Just a second," he said.

I stopped, my eyes studying his face. He was a big guy, with a thin nose and pleasant blue eyes. He was

smiling, and the smile wasn't pleasant. "What's the trouble, officer?" I asked.

"No trouble," he answered. "You Matt Cordell?"

A frown edged onto my forehead. "Yes. What . . ."

"Want to come along with me?" he asked pleasantly.

I kept staring at him. "Why? What do you want with me?"

"We've had a complaint, Cordell."

"What kind of a complaint?"

"They'll explain it to you."

"Suppose you explain it," I said.

"Suppose I don't," the cop answered.

"Look," I said, "don't blind me with your badge. I've had enough cops in my hair to last me . . ."

He grabbed the cuff of my jacket and twisted it in his fist, bringing my arm up behind me at the same time. I winced in pain, and the cop said, "Let's do it the easy way, Cordell. This is a nice quiet neighborhood."

"Sure," I said. "Just let go my goddamned arm."

He stopped twisting it, but he kept holding to the cuff, edging me toward the curb and the squad car I hadn't noticed until just then.

"Hop in," he said, holding open the door. "This one is on the City."

I got in, and he climbed in behind me, wedging me between himself and the driver. He closed the door and said, "Okay, Sam," and the cop behind the wheel threw

the car into gear and shoved off.

We pulled up alongside a grey stone building with green lights hanging on either side of the door. The cop held the car door open for me, and then the driver stood on the sidewalk with his hand on the butt of his holstered .38 Police Special while the first cop and I climbed the steps to the precinct.

The cop led me straight to the desk and said, "I've got Cordell, Ed. Want to tell the lieutenant?"

I shifted my weight and eyed the precinct with disgust. I didn't like cops. I didn't like them at all. I'd rarely had anything to do with them when I was practising, and since they'd taken away my license I avoided them completely.

"Go on in," the cop behind the desk said. "Lieutenant's expecting you."

The big cop nodded, shoved me ahead of him down a hallway near the front of the station. He opened a door for me about halfway down the hall, gestured with his thumb, and then added another shove to make sure I went the right way.

The plainclothes man sitting behind the desk stood up when I came in. He nodded at the cop and said, "All right, Jim. I'll take it from here." Jim saluted smartly, like a rookie after Corporal's stripes, and then left me alone with the plainclothes man. A plaque read: Detective-Lieutenant Gunnisson.

"What's it all about, Lieutenant?" I asked.

Gunnisson was a smallish cop with a balding head and weary eyes. His mouth echoed the weariness by dripping loosely down to an almost invisible chin. He looked more like the caretaker in a museum than a police lieutenant, and I wondered which Congressman his family had known.

"You're Matt Cordell, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Got a complaint, Cordell."

"So I've heard."

He lifted his brows quickly, and his brown eyes snapped to my face. "Don't get snotty, Cordell. We're just itching to jug you."

"On what charge?"

"Practicing without a license."

"Where'd you dream that one up?"

"We got a complaint."

"Who from?"

"Phone call. Clocked at . . ."

He glanced at a paper on his desk. "Four forty-five."

"Who from?"

"Caller wouldn't give a name. Said you were investigating a case, and thought we should look into it. What about it, Cordell?"

"It's all horse manure."

"You're not on a case?"

"A case of scotch, maybe. Who'd hire me, Lieutenant?"

"That's the same question I asked."

"Well, you got your answer. Can I go now?"

"Just a second. Not so fast." His

manner relaxed, and he sat down behind the desk, offering me a cigarette. I took it, and he lit it for me and then smiled.

"What you been doing, Cordell?" he asked.

"Spending my winters in Florida. Don't I look it?"

He seemed about to get sore, but then the smile flitted onto his face again, becoming a small chuckle in a few seconds. "Tell you the truth," he said abruptly, "I think you were right, Cordell. That bastard had it coming to him."

I didn't say anything. I watched his face warily.

"Fact," he went on, "you should have given him more. How'd you catch him, Cordell?"

"What do you mean?"

"What happened? The papers said you went into the bedroom and found him loving your wife? That right? What was the bastard doing?" His eyes were gleaming brightly now. "Was she really in a nightgown? Did he. . . ?"

I leaned over the desk and grabbed the lapels of his suit in both my hands. "Shut up!" I said. My face was tight, and I was ready to tear this filthy little weasel into little pieces.

"Listen, Cordell. . ." Some of his old manner was back, some of the hard shell of the policeman.

"Shut up!" I shoved him hard and he flew back into his chair, and then the chair toppled over and fell to the floor. He blinked his eyes,

and all the filth in his mind crowded into his face, leaving a small man hiding behind the skirts of a big job. He scrambled to his knees and flicked open the bottom drawer of his desk. His hand crawled into the drawer like a fast spider. He was pulling his hand out, when I stepped behind the desk and kicked the drawer shut.

He would have screamed, but I kicked out again and this time it was where he lived, and he doubled up in pain, his face twisted into a horrible, distorted grimace.

I stood over him with my fists clenched. He'd forgotten all about the gun in the bottom drawer now. He was more concerned with his own anguish.

"I'm leaving," I told him.

"You stinking. . ."

"You can send one of your boys after me if you like, Lieutenant. Unless you're afraid of walking down dark streets at night."

"You're not getting away with this," he gasped. "You're. . ."

"Assault and battery, resisting arrest. . . what else? I'll serve the sentence, lieutenant, while you prepare your will."

"You threatening me, Cordell?"

I stood over him and the look in my eyes told him I wasn't kidding. "Yes, Lieutenant, I'm threatening you. My advice is to forget all about this. Just forget I was even here."

He got to his feet and was about to say something when the door sprang open. The big cop, Jim,

looked at the lieutenant and then at me.

"Everything all right, sir?" he asked.

Gunnisson hesitated for a moment, and then his eyes met mine and he turned his face quickly. "Yes," he said sharply. "God-damned chair fell over." He passed his hand over his scalp and said, "Show Mr. Cordell out. He was just leaving."

I smiled thinly, and Detective-Lieutenant Gunnisson picked up the chair and sat in it, busying himself with some reports on his desk. Jim closed the door behind him and I asked, "Did you really get a complaint?"

"Sure. What the hell you think — we got nothing better to do than play around with a monkey like you?"

I didn't answer him. I walked straight to the front door, down the front steps and out into the street.

VIII

Dusk crouched on the horizon, and then night sprang into its place, leaping into the sky like a black panther. The stars pressed inquisitive white noses against the black pane of darkness, and the moon beamed like a balding old man.

The neon flickers stabbed the darkness with lurid reds and greens, oranges, blues, giving Spring her evening clothes. There was still a warm breeze on the air, and inside

Club Dewdrop, I could hear a throaty tenor sax doing crazy things with *How High The Moon*.

It was ten o'clock.

I walked up the driveway quickly, heading for the sidewalk, walking rapidly, the way a young girl anxious to meet her lover would walk. My heels clicked on the pavement, echoing in the darkness of the tree-lined street. I turned left on Burke and headed for the elevated structure, taking the steps up two at a time. I walked to the change booth, slipped a quarter under the grilled panel.

"Hey," the attendant said, "hiya."

"Hiya. What time's the next downtown train pull in?"

He glanced up at the clock. "About ten-oh-nine."

"That the one the girl would catch?"

He nodded. "Yeah, yeah, I guess so. You having any luck?"

"Not much," I said. I collected my change, shoved my way through the turnstile. The clock on the wall said ten-oh-six. I climbed the steps to the Downtown side. I reached the platform and waited, and in a few minutes a downtown express pulled in. The doors slid open, and I stepped into the train, starting to look immediately for a conductor. I was going to take a narrow gamble, and even if it paid off, I didn't know where to go from there. But the gamble was necessary because so far I'd slammed into blank wall after blank wall — and Freddie was

still loose somewhere in the city.

I found the conductor in one of the middle cars, reading a morning newspaper. I sat down next to him and he glanced at me sideways and then went back to the paper.

"Are you the only conductor on the train?" I asked.

He looked up suspiciously. "Yes. Why?"

"Have you had the night shift long?"

"Past month. Why?"

The train rumbled into the Allerton Avenue station, and he got up to press the buttons that would open the doors. He stood between the cars, waiting for the passengers to load and unload, and then he came back to his seat.

"Why?" he asked immediately.

I fished the picture out of my jacket pocket. "Know this girl?"

He stared at the picture curiously, and then looked at me as if I were nuts. "Can't say that I do."

"Look at it hard," I said. "Look at it damned hard. She got on at Burke Avenue, every Friday and Saturday night, and once during the week. She always caught this train. Look at the goddamned picture!"

He looked at the picture hard, and the train rumbled toward the next station. He still hadn't said a word when we pulled into Pelham Parkway and he got up to press his buttons again. When he came back, he continued to look at the picture.

"We'll be in Grand Central before you make up your mind."

"I already made up my mind. I never seen her before." He paused. "Why do you want her?"

"Look at it again," I told him, almost reaching out for his throat. "She was a happy sort of kid. Smiling all the time. Goddamn it, mister, remember!"

"There's nothing to remember. I just never seen her before."

I slapped the picture against the palm of my hand. "Jesus! Who else works on this train?"

"Just me and the motorman, that's all."

"Where's the motorman? First car?"

"Listen, you can't bother him with that . . ."

"Open your doors, mister. Here's Bronx Park East."

He turned to say something, then realized the train was already in the station. I left him as he stepped between the cars, and I ran all the way to the first car. I was wild now, reaching for straws, but someone had to remember, someone! The train was just starting up again when I reached the motorman's little compartment and yanked open the door.

He was a small man with glasses, and he almost leaped out the window when I jabbed the picture at him.

"Do you know this girl?"

"What?"

"Look at this picture! Do you know this girl? Have you ever seen her before riding on this train?"

"Hey," he said, "you ain't allowed in here."

"Shut up and look at this picture."

He glanced at it quickly, switching his eyes back to the track ahead almost instantly. "No. I don't know her."

"You never . . ."

"I watch the tracks," he said dutifully, "not the broads that get on and off."

I slammed the door on his soliloquy and started toward the back of the train again. I was ready to beat the old man's head against the metal floor if he didn't start remembering damned soon. When I reached him, he shouted, "You get off this train! You get off this train or I'll get help at the next station."

I took a quick evaluation of his chances of ever remembering Betty, and when the train pulled into 180th Street I got off with the conductor swearing behind me. I crossed under the platforms and came up on the Uptown side. Then I took the next train back to Burke Avenue, heading for *Club Dewdrop*.

It was like a big merry-go-round, with me grabbing at the brass ring and always missing. I was ready to call it quits again, ready to chuck the whole stinking mess back into Rudy's lap. But there was one person I wanted to see again. She'd given me almost everything I knew about Betty Richards, and I had a hunch I could get more information from her if I really tried.

I hoped she'd be at the *Dewdrop*, and I was happy to see her sitting in a chair just inside the door when I walked in. The record player was dispensing some dream-inducing stuff, and I walked straight to her and said, "Dance?"

She looked up and gave me a half-smile. "You still haven't shaved, have you?"

"No, Donna."

"All right, let's dance." She got to her feet, holding her hand out for my assistance. She wasn't wearing a sweater and shorts now. She wore a green dress that was slashed low over the deep flare of her breasts. Her flesh was crouched in shadow, warm and firm where her breasts met in a deep cleft. I took her into my arms and she moved closer to me and I danced her to the door. I held her away from me as we climbed the lone step to the concrete back yard.

"You don't believe in preliminaries, do you?" she asked.

I didn't answer.

We were already outside in the dark, and she knew this back yard like the curve of her own thigh. She pinned me against the brick wall, covering my lips with her mouth, urging me with her body. I didn't need much urging. She squirmed away from me and laughed a little, taking my hand and leading me to the side of the house where a patch of grass made a bid for existence between the areas of concrete. The grass was surprisingly soft, cloaked in deep shadows. There was the

smell of the country about it, and there was a mild breeze and a black sky full of stars with hungry mouths.

Her mouth was hungry too, and it stirred a deeper hunger within me. In a little while, there was nothing but the firmness of her body beneath my hands, and then there wasn't even that because the sky fell down in a shattering, screaming explosion that left me weak and spent.

We didn't say anything for a long time. Then she lay back with her eyes closed, and finally sighed and said, "I'm glad you came after me, Matt. These kids were beginning to get into my hair."

I blinked at the darkness. "I really came to ask more questions," I said.

"I don't care why you're here. You're here, that's all that counts."

We were quiet again until she asked, "Are you any closer to him?"

"Not really," I said. "I wanted to ask you more about him. Did she ever say anything that would . . ."

"Nothing, Matt. She talked about him like . . . well, you know how kids are. As if he was a knight or something. You know. She talked to me a lot. We hit it off right from the beginning. Those things happen sometimes."

"Yeah," I said. Donna knew nothing more about Freddie. Nothing.

This was the end of the trail. Curtain. Freddie was still a blank

face with a murder weapon in his hands. Nothing more. I was ready to call it quits.

"I went over to her because she looked kind of lonely the first night she came down. We got to chatting, and before the night was over we'd exchanged phone numbers. Never used them, but . . ."

"You still have the number?"

"Why, yes. I think so. Somewhere in my purse. She wrote it on a matchbook cover."

"You'd better let me have it," I said. That was the coward's way of doing it. I'd call Rudy and break it to him over the phone. Tell him I'd done my damndest but I was tired and beaten, and the police would have to do the rest.

Donna sighed. "Now? I thought we might . . ."

"Now," I said.

She sat up wearily, then stood and smoothed her dress over her hips. "Do I look all right?"

I couldn't see a damned thing in the darkness. "You look fine," I said.

"I'll be right back."

She walked into the rectangle of light cast by the open door of the club, and then stepped inside. She was back in a few minutes with her purse and the matchbook cover. "Here it is. You're not going, are you?"

"I have to make a call."

"This is getting to be a habit, I know, but come back, Matt. This time I mean it. Please come back."

"You didn't mean it last time?"

She shrugged and smiled wistfully. "You know how it is. Come back to me, Matt. Come back."

I left her standing in the amber rectangle of light, and I walked to the nearest candy store and settled myself in the booth. I looked at the numbers written with a ball point pen on the matchcover, and then began to dial. Halfway through, it occurred to me that Rudy probably wouldn't be home, not if he left for work at four-thirty in the afternoon. I finished dialing anyway, looking down at the scrawled numbers. The phone began to ring on the other end, and I kept staring down at the numbers.

And all at once it hit, and I hung up quickly.

Just like that, and it made me a little sick, but it also made me feel a little better because it was all over now.

IX

I was waiting for Freddie.

It was close to one-thirty in the morning, and the streets were deserted. Spring had retreated into a cold fog that clouded the lights from the lamp posts, swirled underfoot like elusive ghosts.

I waited until the ignition was cut, listened to the door slam, and the clack of his heels against the sidewalk. The fog lifted a misty barrier between us, and he didn't see me until he was almost on me.

"Hello, Freddie," I said.

"Wh . . ." He stared at me.

He backed away a few paces, and his hand went to his mouth. He recognized me then, blinked his eyes several times, and said, "Matt. What are you doing here at this hour?"

"Waiting. Waiting for you."

"Matt . . ."

"You're a son of a bitch, Rudy." I said.

"Matt . . ."

"She looked just the way your wife did at that age, didn't she, Rudy? Isn't that what you told me?"

"Matt, you've got this all wrong."

"I've got it all right, Rudy. Why didn't you leave her alone? Why couldn't you leave her alone, you bastard?"

"Matt, listen to me . . ."

"Why'd you hire me? Because you knew I was a stumble bum? Because your wife was hounding hell out of you to get a detective? Because you figured Matt Cordell was a drunkard who couldn't solve his way out of a pay toilet? Is that why?"

"No, Matt. I came to you because . . ."

"Shut up, Rudy! Shut your filthy mouth before I close it for good. You didn't have to kill her."

He crumbled then. He leaned back against the wall, and his face slowly came apart. He raised a trembling hand to his mouth. His teeth chattered.

"What happened?" I asked. "Was

she finally going to talk? Was she finally going to tell all about her mystery lover? Was that it?"

Rudy closed his eyes nodding.

"So you killed her. Snuffed her out. A ride in your cab, Rudy? The same cab you used to pick her up in downtown? The same cab you . . ."

"Stop it, Matt. Stop it! Please."

"I'd never have found Freddie, Rudy. Never. But a friend of Betty's gave me something in her handwriting. And I remembered something you'd showed me a while ago. The address of *Club Dewdrop*, and written in the same hand. And then I wondered why Betty had given you the address — and then I thought about your working hours and the time she always left the club. And then I realized why a seventeen year old kid was so anxious to keep her boy friend a secret. Why'd she give you the address, Rudy? Why?"

"She . . . she wanted me to . . . to pick her up there at first. This was after it had started . . . after our first time . . . after the first time we knew we were in love. I told her it was dangerous, but she gave me the address and we tried it a . . . a few times. Then I suggested that she meet me downtown near my hack stand. We . . . we used the cab. Matt, don't look at me that way. I loved her, Matt."

"Sure. You loved her enough to kill her. And you loved her enough to hire a wino to find Freddie. Freddie. A nice code name. A con-

venient tag in case the kid wanted to talk about her friend." I bit down on my lip. "Was it you who sicced the cops on me? Did I scare you when I came up with the code name?"

"I . . . I called the cops. I told them you were practicing illegally."

"You did it wrong, Rudy."

"How could I tell my wife?" he said. "What could I do, Matt? Betty was ready to crack, ready to tell all of it. Matt, Matt, I had to. I . . . I used the monkey wrench from the cab. I . . . I did it without thinking. She . . . I just . . ." He stopped, and his voice broke, and suddenly he was crying. The fog swept in around us.

"What am I going to tell Madeline, Matt? What can I tell her?"

"You made your bed," I said.

He gripped my arms. "You tell her, Matt," he pleaded. The tears rolled down his face, and he kept repeating "please" until I shook his hands from my arms.

"Sure," I said. "Sure."

I brought Rudy to Detective-Lieutenant Gunnisson, and I left fast. Then I bought a quart of wine, and I killed the whole goddamned thing before I worked up enough nerve to call Madeline and tell her about her husband.

It was hard.

And then I went home, and Madeline's sobs were in my ears for a long time before I finally drank myself to sleep.

First of a new series

Portrait of a Killer

No. 1 — Warren Lincoln

BY DAN SONTUP

HE WAS a little guy. That was the first thing you noticed about him — if you noticed him at all. A skinny, fortyish, bald-headed little runt, who looked as though he'd collapse under the weight of a bag of groceries. But Warren Lincoln had talent — lots of it. He had been a criminal lawyer who knew every legal trick in the book, and he knew crime from one end to the other.

Little Warren took a lot of pushing around before he finally made use of his talent. He was henpecked, as henpecked as a man can get. His wife outweighed him by enough bone and muscle and fat to make another one of him — with some left over. His brother-in-law, Byron Shoup, tipped the scales on the heavy side, too. And, between the two of them, they kept little Warren hopping all around their Aurora, Illinois, home.

Because his wife hated liquor and tobacco, Warren couldn't smoke or drink around the house. Because Byron thought every man should look like a muscle-bound Greek god,

Warren was forced to flex his puny muscles in daily calisthenics. Byron and Mrs. Lincoln even pooled their weights once and beat hell out of Warren's frail physique because he had complained about big brother-in-law Byron stomping all over the sweet peas that Warren loved to grow.

He took it, though, keeping it all locked up inside him, letting the hatred and misery in him sop itself up in the whiskey he swallowed on the sly away from home. He would sit there and drink with his cronies and lose himself in all the courage and comfort a little guy can find in a slug of whiskey.

One night the whiskey slugged back. Warren staggered home loaded to the ears — and that's when Byron and his sister really went to work on him. When they had finished with him, Warren was ready for a hospital bed.

He was also ready to kill.

But he took his time about it. His clever legal mind was already at work even before the bruises healed. He set the whole thing up like a

lawyer planning a case, figuring every move the opposition would make. First, he let it be known that his wife had a secret lover in another city and even displayed a phony love letter to prove this. Then he spread the word that he had other love letters hidden in a safe deposit box and that his wife had hired a private detective to get the letters back. He made it convincing, too, by use of some cleverly faked evidence.

The stage was set now, and the killing turned out to be the easiest part.

It was a simple matter to pull the trigger on a gun equipped with a silencer — and Warren became a widower and a man minus a brother-in-law. Disposing of the evidence was also fairly simple. Warren merely proceeded to hack up what was left of his loving family and feed the pieces into a furnace in the greenhouse he had built to help raise his sweet peas. Any bones that remained in the ashes were ground into fertilizer and used on his favorite flower.

He had trouble with the heads, though, and that's where he put the finishing touch to his blow for freedom. In a huge flower box of sweet peas on his porch, Warren deposited the heads of his wife and her brother, covering them with plenty of lime and earth. Byron's feet had trampled the sweet peas — now his head was

providing good fertilizer for them.

Warren explained the absence of the two of them by telling his cronies that he had ordered them both out of his home, and he then set out to enjoy the life of a free man, of a little guy with no one to tell him what to do anymore. He wasn't worried at all. Even when the police began to pry, he didn't worry. Even when they finally confronted him with proof that he *must* have killed his wife and brother-in-law, he only smiled and still didn't worry. Sweet peas don't talk. And, when the police finally got around to digging in the flower box, as Warren figured they would, he smiled a little more. Quicklime worked fast, he knew. Even a dental identification wouldn't be possible.

But Warren's smile quickly vanished when the police came up with two almost perfectly preserved heads.

Afterwards, Warren had lots of time to think about it. He had made the "one little mistake" that spoils many a "perfect crime," both in fact and in fiction.

He had dipped into what he thought was a barrel of deadly quicklime, but it had been a barrel of slaked lime instead — and slaked lime acts as an excellent preservative for dead bodies.

A simple little mistake for a little man with lots of talent.





Cigarette Girl

BY JAMES M. CAIN

Bullets weren't in Cameron's line, but he couldn't back out. He couldn't leave the girl alone again.

I'D NEVER SO MUCH as laid eyes on her before going in this place, the *Here's How*, a night-club on Route 1, a few miles north of Washington, on business that was 99% silly, but that I had to keep to myself. It was around 8 at night, with hardly anyone there, and I'd just taken a table, ordered a drink, and started to unwrap a cigar, when a whiff of perfume hit me, and she swept by with cigarettes. As to what she looked

like, I had only a rear view, but the taffeta skirt, crepe blouse, and silver earrings were quiet, and the chassis was choice, call it fancy, a little smaller than medium. So far, a cigarette girl, nothing to rate any cheers, but not bad either, for a guy unattached who'd like an excuse to linger.

But then she made a pitch, or what I took for a pitch. Her middle-aged customer was trying to tell her some joke, and taking so long about it the proprietor got in the act. He was a big, blond, blocky guy, with kind of a decent face, but he went and whispered to her as though to hustle her up, for some reason apparently, I couldn't quite figure it out. She didn't much seem to like it, until her eye caught mine. She gave a little pout, a little shrug, a little wink, and then just stood there, smiling.

Now I know this pitch and it's nice, because of course I smiled back, and with that I was on the hook. A smile is nature's freeway: it has lanes, and you can go any speed you like, except you can't go back. Not that I wanted to, as I suddenly changed my mind about the cigar I had in my hand, stuck it back in my pocket, and wigwagged for cigarettes. She nodded, and when she came over said: "You stop laughing at me."

"Who's laughing? Looking."

"Oh, of course. That's different."

I picked out a pack, put down my buck, and got the surprise of my

life: she gave me change. As she started to leave, I said: "You forgot something, maybe?"

"That's not necessary."

"For all this I get, I should pay."

"All what, sir, for instance?"

"I told you: the beauty that fills my eye."

"The best things in life are free."

"On that basis, fair lady, some of them, here, are tops. Would you care to sit down?"

"Can't."

"Why not?"

"Not allowed. We got rules."

With that she went out toward the rear somewhere, and I noticed the proprietor again, just a short distance away, and realized he'd been edging in. I called him over and said: "What's the big idea? I was talking to her."

"Mister, she's paid to work."

"Yeah, she mentioned about rules, but now they got other things too. Four Freedoms, all kinds of stuff. Didn't anyone ever tell you?"

"I heard of it, yes."

"You're Mr. *Here's How*?"

"Jack Conner, to my friends."

I took a V from my wallet, folded it, creased it, pushed it toward him. I said: "Jack, little note of introduction I generally carry around. I'd like you to ease these rules. She's cute, and I crave to buy her a drink."

He didn't see any money, and stood for a minute thinking. Then: "Mister, you're off on the wrong foot. In the first place, she's not a

cigarette girl. Tonight, yes, when the other girl is off. But not regular, no. In the second place, she's not any chiselly-wink, that orders rye, drinks tea, takes the four bits you slip her, the four I charge for the drink — and is open to propositions. She's class. She's used to class — out West, with people that have it, and that brought her East when they came. In the third place she's a friend, and before I eased any rules I'd have to know more about you, a whole lot more, than this note tells me."

"My name's Cameron."

"Pleased to meet you and all that, but as to who you are, Mr. Cameron, and what you are, I still don't know —"

"I'm a musician."

"Yeah? What instrument?"

"Any of them. Guitar, mainly."

Which brings me to what I was doing there. I do play the guitar, play it all day long, for the help I get from it, as it gives me certain chords, the big ones that people go for, and heads me off from some others, the fancy ones on the piano, that other musicians go for. I'm an arranger, based in Baltimore, and had driven down on a little tune detecting. The guy who takes most of my work, Art Lomak, the band leader, writes a few tunes himself, and had gone clean off his rocker about one he said had been stolen, or thefted as they call it. It was one he'd been playing a little, to try it and work out bugs, with lyric and title to come, soon as the idea hit

him. And then he rang me, with screams. It had already gone on the air, as 20 people had told him, from this same little honky-tonk, as part of a 10 o'clock spot on the Washington FM pick-up. He begged me to be here tonight, when the trio started their broadcast, pick up such dope as I could, and tomorrow give him the low-down.

That much was right on the beam, stuff that goes on every day, a routine I knew by heart. But his tune had angles, all of them slightly peculiar. One was, it had already been written, though it was never a hit and was almost forgotten, in the days when states were hot, under the title *Nevada*. Another was, it had been written even before that, by a gent named Giuseppe Verdi, as part of the *Sicilian Vespers*, under the title *O Tu Palermo*. Still another was, Art was really burned, and seemed to have no idea where the thing had come from. They just can't get it, those big schmalzburgers like him, that what leaks out of their head might, just once, have leaked in. But the twist, the reason I had to come, and couldn't just play it for laughs, was: Art could have been right. Maybe the lift *was* from him, not from the original opera, or from the first theft, *Nevada*. It's a natural for a $\frac{3}{4}$ beat, and that's how Art had been playing it. So if that's how they were doing it here, instead of with Nevada's $\frac{4}{4}$, which followed the Verdi signature, there might still be plenty of work for the lawyers

Art had put on it, with screams, same like to me.

Silly, almost.

Spooky.

But maybe, just possibly, moola.

So Jack, this boss character, by now had smelled something fishy, and suddenly took a powder, to the stand where the fiddles were parked, as of course the boys weren't there yet, and came back with a Spanish guitar. I took it, thanked him, and tuned. To kind of work it around, in the direction of Art's little problem, and at the same time make like there was nothing at all to conceal, I said I'd come on account of his band, to catch it during the broadcast, as I'd heard it was pretty good. He didn't react, which left me nowhere, but I thought it well to get going.

I played him *Night and Day*, no Segovia job, but plenty good, for free. On "Day and Night," where it really opens up, I knew things to do, and talk suddenly stopped among the scattering of people that were in there. When I finished there was some little clapping, but still he didn't react, and I gave thought to mayhem. But then a buzzer sounded, and he took another powder, out toward the rear this time, where she had disappeared. I began a little beguine, but he was back. He bowed, picked up his V, bowed again, said: "Mr. Cameron, the guitar did it. She heard you, and you're in."

"Will you set me up for two?"

"Hold on, there's a catch."

He said until midnight, when one of his men would take over, she was checking his orders. "That means she handles the money, and if she's not there, I could just as well close down. You're invited back with her, but she can't come out with you."

"Oh. Fine."

"Sir, you asked for it."

It wasn't quite the way I'd have picked to do it, but the main thing was the girl, and I followed him through the OUT door, the one his waiters were using, still with my Spanish guitar. But then, all of a sudden, I loved it, and felt even nearer to her.

This was the works of the joint, with a little office at one side, service bar on the other, range rear and center, the crew in white all around, getting the late stuff ready. But high on a stool, off by herself, on a little railed-in platform where waiters would have to pass, she was waving at me, treating it all as a joke. She called down: "Isn't this a balcony scene for you? You have to play me some music!"

I whapped into it quick, and when I told her it was *Romeo and Juliet*, she said it was just what she'd wanted. By then Jack had a stool he put next to hers, so I could sit beside her, back of her little desk. He introduced us, and it turned out her name was Stark. I climbed up and there we were, out in the middle of the air, and yet in a way private, as the crew played it funny, to the

extent they played it at all, but mostly were too busy even to look. I put the guitar on the desk and kept on with the music. By the time I'd done some Showboat she was calling me Bill and to me she was Lydia. I remarked on her eyes, which were green, and showed up bright against her creamy skin and ashy blond hair. She remarked on mine, which are light, watery blue, and I wished I was something besides tall, thin, and red-haired. But it was kind of cute when she gave a little pinch and nipped one of my freckles, on my hand back of the thumb.

Then Jack was back, with champagne iced in a bucket, which I hadn't ordered. When I remembered my drink, the one I *had* ordered, he said Scotch was no good, and this would be on him. I thanked him, but after he'd opened and poured, and I'd leaned the guitar in a corner and raised my glass to her, I said: "What's made him so friendly?"

"Oh, Jack's always friendly."

"Not to me. Oh, no."

"He may have thought I had it coming. Some little thing to cheer me. My last night in the place."

"You going away?"

"M'm-h'm."

"When?"

"Tonight."

"That why you're off at 12?"

"Jack tell you that?"

"He told me quite a lot."

"Plane leaves at 1. Bag's gone already. It's at the airport, all checked and ready to be weighed."

She clinked her glass to mine, took a little sip, and drew a deep, trembly breath. As for me, I felt downright sick, just why I couldn't say, as it had to all be strictly allegro, with nobody taking it serious. It stuck in my throat a little when I said: "Well — happy landings. Is it permitted to ask which way that plane is taking you?"

"Home."

"And where's that?"

"It's — not important."

"The West, I know that much."

"What else did Jack tell you?"

I took it, improvised, and made up a little stuff, about her high-toned friends, her being a society brat, spoiled as all get-out, and the heavy dough she was used to — a light rib, as I thought. But it hadn't gone very far when I saw it was missing bad. When I cut it off, she took it. She said: "Some of that's true, in a way. I was — fortunate, we'll call it. But — you still have no idea, have you, Bill, what I really am?"

"I've been playing by ear."

"I wonder if you want to know?"

"If you don't want to, I'd rather you didn't say."

None of it was turning out quite as I wanted, and I guess maybe I showed it. She studied me a little and asked: "The silver I wear, that didn't tell you anything? Or my giving you change for your dollar? It didn't mean anything to you, that a girl would run a straight game?"

"She's not human."

"*It means she's a gambler.*"

And then: "Bill, does that shock you?"

"No, not at all."

"I'm not ashamed of it. Out home, it's legal. You know where that is now?"

"Oh! Oh!"

"Why oh? And oh?"

"Nothing. It's — Nevada, isn't it?"

"Something wrong with Nevada?"

"No! I just woke up, that's all."

I guess that's what I said, but whatever it was, she could hardly miss the upbeat in my voice. Because, of course, that wrapped it all up pretty, not only the tune, which the band would naturally play for her, but her too, and who she was. Society dame, to tell the truth, hadn't pleased me much, and maybe that was one reason my rib was slightly off key. But gambler I could go for, a little cold, a little dangerous, a little brave. When she was sure I had really bought it, we were close again, and after a nip on the freckle her fingers slid over my hand. She said play her *Smoke* — the smoke she had in her eyes. But I didn't, and we just sat there some little time.

And then, a little bit at a time, she began to spill it: "Bill, it was just plain cock-eyed. I worked in a club, the Paddock, in Reno, a regular institution. Tony Rocco — Rock — owned it, and was the squarest bookie ever — why he was a Senator, and civic, and everything. And I worked for him, running his wires,

practically being his manager, with a beautiful salary, a bonus at Christmas, and everything. And then wham, it struck. This federal thing. This 10% tax on gross. And we were out of business. It just didn't make sense. Everything else was exempted. Wheels and boards and slots, whatever you could think of, but us. Us and the numbers racket, in Harlem and Florida and Washington."

"Take it easy."

"That's right, Bill. Thanks."

"Have some wine."

". . . Rock, of course, was fixed. He had property, and for the building, where the Paddock was, he got \$250,000 — or so I heard. But then came the tip on Maryland."

That crossed me up, and instead of switching her off, I asked her what she meant. She said: "That Maryland would legalize wheels."

"What do you smoke in Nevada?"

"Oh, I didn't believe it. And Rock didn't. But Mrs. Rock went nuts about it. Oh well, she had a reason."

"Dark, handsome reason?"

"I don't want to talk about it, but that reason took the Rocks for a ride, for every cent they got for the place, and tried to take me too, for other things beside money. When they went off to Italy, they thought they had it fixed, he was to keep me at my salary, in case Maryland *would* legalize, and if not, to send me home, with severance pay, as it's called. And instead of that —"

"I'm listening."

"I've said too much."

"What's this guy to you?"

"Nothing! I never even saw him until the three of us stepped off the plane — with our hopes. In a way it seemed reasonable. Maryland has tracks, and they help with the taxes. Why not wheels?"

"And *who* is this guy?"

"I'd be ashamed to say, but I'll say this much: I won't be a kept floozy. I don't care who he thinks he is, or —"

She bit her lip, started to cry, and really shut up then. To switch off, I asked why she was working for Jack, and she said: "Why not? You can't go home in a barrel. But he's been swell to me."

Saying people were swell seemed to be what she liked, and she calmed down, letting her hand stay when I pressed it in both of mine. Then we were really close, and I meditated if we were close enough that I'd be warranted in laying it on the line, she should let that plane fly away, and not go to Nevada at all. But while I was working on that, business was picking up, with waiters stopping by to let her look at their trays, and I hadn't much chance to say it, whatever I wanted to say. Then, through the IN door, a waiter came through with a tray that had a wine bottle on it. A guy followed him in, a little noisy guy, who said the bottle was full and grabbed it off the tray. He had hardly gone out again, when Jack was in the door, watching him as he staggered back

to the table. The waiter swore the bottle was empty, but all Jack did was nod.

Then Jack came over to her, took another little peep through the window in the OUT door, which was just under her balcony, and said: "Lydia, what did you make of him?"

"Why — he's drunk, that's all."

"You notice him, Mr. Cameron?"

"No — except it crossed my mind he wasn't as tight as the act he was putting on."

"Just what crossed *my* mind! How could he get that drunk on a split of Napa red? What did he want back here?"

By now, the waiter had gone out on the floor and come back, saying the guy wanted his check. But as he started to shuffle it out of the bunch he had tucked in his best, Jack stopped him and said: "He don't get any check — not till I give the word. Tell Joe I said stand by and see he don't get out. *Move!*"

The waiter had looked kind of blank, but hustled out as told, and then Jack looked at her. He said: "Lady, I'll be back. I'm taking a look around."

He went, and she drew another of her long, trembly breaths. I cut my eye around, but no one had noticed a thing, and yet it seemed kind of funny they'd all be slicing bread, wiping glass, or fixing cocktail set-ups, with Jack mumbling it low out of the side of his mouth. I had a creepy feeling of things going on, and my mind took it a little, fitting

it together, what she had said about the bag checked at the airport, the guy trying to make her, and most of all, the way Jack had acted, the second she showed with her cigarettes, shooing her off the floor, getting her out of sight. She kept staring through the window, at the drunk where he sat with his bottle, and seemed to ease when a captain I took to be Joe planted himself pretty solid in a spot that would block off a run-out.

Then Jack was back, marching around, snapping his fingers, giving orders for the night. But as he passed the back door, I noticed his hand touched the lock, as though putting the catch on. He started back to the floor, but stopped as he passed her desk, and shot it quick in a whisper: "He's out there, Lydia, parked in back. This drunk, like I thought, is a finger he sent in to spot you, but he won't be getting out till you're gone. You're leaving for the airport, right now."

"Will you call me a cab, Jack?"

"Cab? I'm taking you."

He stepped near me and whispered: "Mr. Cameron, I'm sorry, this little lady has to leave, for —"

"I know about that."

"She's in danger —"

"I've also caught on to that."

"From a no-good imitation goon that's been trying to get to her here, which is why I'm shipping her out. I hate to break this up, but if you'll ride with us, Mr. Cameron —"

"I'll follow you down."

"That's right, you have your car. It's Friendship Airport, just down the road."

He told her to get ready, while he was having his car brought up, and the boy who would take her place on the desk was changing his clothes. Step on it, he said, but wait until he came back. He went out on the floor and marched past the drunk without even turning his head. But she sat watching me. She said: "You're not coming, are you?"

"Friendship's a little cold."

"But not mine, Bill, no."

She got off her stool, stood near me and touched my hair. She said: "Ships that pass in the night pass so close, so close." And then: "I'm ashamed, Bill, I'd have to go for this reason. I wonder, for the first time, if gambler's really much good." She pulled the chain of the light, so we were half in the dark. Then she kissed me. She said: "God bless and keep you, Bill."

"And you, Lydia."

I felt her tears on my cheek, and then she pulled away and stepped to the little office, where she began putting a coat on and tying a scarf on her head. She looked so pretty it came to me I still hadn't given her the one little bouquet I'd been saving for the last. I picked up the guitar and started *Nevada*.

She wheeled, but what stared at me were eyes as hard as glass. I was so startled I stopped, but she kept right on staring. Outside a car door slammed, and she listened at the

window beside her. Then at last she looked away, to peep through the Venetian blind. Jack popped in, wearing his coat and hat, and motioned her to hurry. But he caught something and said, low yet so I could hear him: "Lydia! What's the matter?"

She stalked over to me, with him following along, pointed her finger, and then didn't say it, but spat it: "He's the finger — that's what's the matter, that's all. He played *Nevada*, as though we hadn't had enough trouble with it already. And Vanny heard it. He hopped out of his car and he's under the window right now."

"Then O. K., let's go."

I was a little too burned to make with the explanations, and took my time, parking the guitar, sliding off, and climbing down, to give them a chance to blow. But she still had something to say, and to me, not to him. She pushed her face up to mine, and mocking how I had spoken, yipped: "Oh! . . . Oh! OH!" Then she went, with Jack. Then I went, clumping after.

Then it broke wide open.

The drunk, who was supposed to sit there, conveniently boxed in, while she went slipping out, turned out more of a hog-calling type, and instead of playing his part, jumped up and yelled: "Vanny! Vanny! Here she comes! She's leaving! VANNY!"

He kept it up, while women screamed all over, then pulled a gun from his pocket, and let go at the

ceiling, so it sounded like the field artillery, as shots always do when fired inside a room. Jack jumped for him and hit the deck, as his feet shot from under him on the slippery wood of the dance floor. Joe swung, missed, swung again, and landed, so Mr. Drunk went down. But when Joe scrambled for the gun, there came this voice through the smoke: "Hold it! As you were — and leave that gun alone."

Then hulking in came this short-necked, thick-shouldered thing, in Homburg hat, double-breasted coat, and white muffler, one hand in his pocket, the other giving an imitation of a movie gangster. He said keep still and nobody would get hurt, but "I won't stand for tricks." He helped Jack up, asked how he'd been. Jack said: "Young man, let me tell you something —"

"How you been? I asked."

"Fine, Mr. Rocco."

"Any telling, Jack — I'll do it."

Then, to her: "Lydia, how've you been?"

"That doesn't concern you."

Then she burst out about what he had done to his mother, the gyp he'd handed his father, and his propositions to her, and I got it, at last, who this idiot was. He listened, but right in the middle of it, he waved his hand toward me and asked: "Who's this gyp?"

"Vanny, I think you know."

"Guy, are you the boy friend?"

"If so I don't tell you."

I sounded tough, but my belly

didn't feel that way. They had it some more, and he connected me with the tune, and seemed to enjoy it a lot, that it had told him where to find her, on the broadcast and here now tonight. But he kept creeping closer, to where we were all lined up, with the drunk stretched on the floor, the gun under his hand, and I suddenly felt the prickle, that Vanny was really nuts, and in a minute meant to kill her. It also crossed my mind, that a guy who plays the guitar has a left hand made of steel, from squeezing down on the strings, and is a dead sure judge of distance, to the last eighth of an inch. I prayed I could forget it, told myself I owed her nothing at all, that she'd turned on me cold, with no good reason. I concentrated, to dismiss the thought entirely.

Ne soap.

I grabbed for my chord and got it.

I choked down on his hand, the one he held in his pocket, while hell broke loose in the place, with women screaming, men running, and fists trying to help. I had the gun hand all right, but when I reached for the other he twisted, butted, and bit, and for that long I thought he'd get loose, and that I was a gone pigeon. The gun barked, and a piledriver hit my leg. I went down. Another gun spoke and he went down beside me. Then there was Jack, the drunk's

gun in his hand, stepping in close, and firing again to make sure.

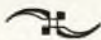
I blacked out.

I came to, and then she was there, a knife in her hand, ripping the cloth away from the outside of my leg, grabbing napkins, stanching blood, while somewhere ten miles off I could hear Jack's voice, as he yelled into a phone. On the floor right beside me was something under a tablecloth.

That went on for some time, with Joe calming things down and some people sliding out. The band came in, and I heard a boy ask for his guitar. Somebody brought it to him. And then, at last, came the screech of sirens, and she whispered some thanks to God.

Then, while the cops were catching up, with me, with Jack, and what was under the cloth, we both went kind of haywire, me laughing, she crying, and both in each others' arms. I said: "Lydia, Lydia, you're not taking that plane. They legalize things in Maryland, one thing specially, except that instead of wheels, they generally use a ring."

Still holding my leg with one hand she pulled me close with the other, kissed me and kept on kissing me, and couldn't speak at all. All legalized now, is what I started to tell about — with Jack as best man, naturally.





Nice Bunch of Guys

It sure is hard to understand women. Imagine Marge blaming the whole thing just on the boys!

BY

MICHAEL FESSIER

ALL the taxi drivers and the fellows who hung around the pool hall would tell you that Marty was a laugh; you should've seen him when the boys got him burnt up about something. He was more fun than a circus, was Marty. Not exactly crazy enough to be put in the nut house or anything like that, just goofy enough to be really pretty darn funny.

He sold papers at the station. They were Posts and Marty yelled something that sounded like "Whoa", so all the fellows got a great kick out of yelling "Giddiap! Whoa!" at him and making him mad. He got screwy when they did that. He'd come across the street with his dirty checkered cap pulled down over one side of his face and his twisted mouth all squeezed up into a snarl.

"You old bootleggers," he'd say. "You old bootleggers!" The fellows got a special kick out of Marty calling 'em bootleggers and they'd laugh like anything. "I'm gonna get you," Marty would say. "Just you wait and see. You'd better not make fun of me."

"Aw, gosh! Don't scare us like that," one of the fellows would say, and everybody'd laugh again. Everyone would gather around. There was always a laugh when you had Marty going. He'd lay his papers on the sidewalk and double up his fists. "Wanna fight?" he'd ask. Then everybody'd act afraid and beg Marty not to hit 'em. Of course they weren't afraid. Marty was just a little fellow and any of the fellows could have licked him easy with one hand. They were just kidding him for a laugh. Even Old Ironsides — that's what they called the corner cop — would come by and grin at Marty standing with his fists doubled up and acting like he was a tough guy.

They'd keep on kidding Marty and he'd start squealing like a stuck

pig, he'd get so mad. You couldn't understand what he was saying when he got mad like that. Just a lot of cuss words that didn't make sense. And his mouth would froth like he was a mad dog or something.

Then somebody'd act like he really was going to fight Marty. He'd double up his fist and prance around and wiggle his arms and say, "All right, Marty, look out!" and he'd make a couple passes at Marty. "Come on, put 'em up," the fellow would say, "I'm gonna knock your can off." Then Marty'd start whimpering like a little kid. He'd rub his eyes and back away and say, "You'd better not. You'd better not. I'll tell the cops, that's what I'll do." Then he'd grab his papers and run like hell back across the street. Gee, it was funny!

It wouldn't be no time before he'd forget all about it and he'd be walking up and down the station platform yelling "Whoa, Whoa," or something that sounded like that. He sold a lot of papers because people felt sorry for him, I guess. He kept all his money in one pocket and when there wasn't anybody around he'd take it out and count it. He'd count his money seventy times a day. Guess it was the biggest kick he got out of life. And you couldn't get him to spend a nickel. Nobody knew what he did with his money. He was nutty about money.

He was always begging for it. "Gimme a nirkel," he'd say, looking up at somebody. "Aw, go on, gimme

a nirkel. Please," he'd say, "go on, please gimme a nirkel." It was funny the way he said nickel. There was something the matter with his tongue and he couldn't talk straight. He'd do anything for a nickel and that's no kidding. He'd do *anything*. Sometimes when the fellows were drunk they'd get Marty in the back room of the pool hall and if you'd been there you'd seen there wasn't anything he wouldn't do for a nickel.

But one of the biggest kicks was when the fellows would kid Marty about his girls. Of course he didn't have any. He was about thirty years old and he had a face like a monkey. His chin sprouted long black hairs that grew far apart and the fellows said he had pig's bristles instead of whiskers. I don't think he ever shaved but the whiskers didn't get any longer. It was funny to think of him having a girl. Gosh, no girl'd even look at him. Even the Mexican woman would chase him away when he'd go to her shack across the tracks and say what the fellows had put him up to saying.

"Hey, Marty," the fellows would say, "who's that hot number we saw with you last night?" And Marty'd grin sly, like he really had been out with a girl, and he'd say, "Nonna yer bursness" or something like that. And they'd say, "Can't you fix it up for us? Gee, she was a hot number. Oh, boy!" Marty'd act real proud like he really could and he'd say, "Naw sir, not youse guys. Not youse guys. T'hell wit' ya."

The funniest thing was when somebody'd ask Marty what he did to the girl. It was a scream. He couldn't even pronounce the word right. "Aw, you never had one in your life," they'd tell him and he'd get mad. "Tha's all *you* know," he'd say. "Tha's all *you* know." All Marty knew about things like that was what he heard the fellows saying in the pool hall. But you'd thought he did all 'em himself the way he talked.

A girl would go by on the other side of the street and the fellows would whisper, "Hey, Marty, that your girl?" And he'd say, "Sure," and they'd act surprised and say "Gosh, Marty, you ever —?" And he'd wink like he'd seen the fellows do and say, "Yeah, sure." Sometimes the woman would be the banker's wife or the girl that played the organ at the church but Marty'd say sure everytime. It didn't matter who it was, he'd say the same thing. The fellows always got a laugh out of that.

One of the worst things Marty could think to call a guy was a boot-legger. The fellows around the taxi stand used to tell him that George Burke, the lawyer, was going to have him put in jail. Marty'd go white every time you mentioned jail to him. He was goofy, but he liked his freedom more'n anybody you ever saw. So when the fellows'd rib him up about Burke he'd get scared stiff, then crazy mad. He'd go running past Burke's office fast's

he could, yelling, "Burke's an old bootlegger! Burke's an old bootlegger! Yeah, Burke's an old darn bootlegger!" Burke was a little red-faced guy and he'd get hopping mad but he never did anything about it. He knew the people would think it was small potatoes for a big lawyer to pick on a half-wit. So he couldn't do anything. Anytime we wanted a boot we'd rib up Marty to go after Burke. You should've seen it.

The fellows all got a kick out of ribbing Marty, but they wouldn't stand for anybody picking on him. One time they told Marty the reporter for another paper was playing dirty tricks on the Post, the paper Marty sold. You'd thought Marty owned the Post the way he was willing to fight for it. He couldn't read, but he'd get sore as hell if you told him the Post wasn't any good. The fellows kept telling Marty this fellow Danny McLeod was scooping the Post and things like that until Marty was hopping mad. One day Danny came walking down the street and one of the fellows said, "There's the dirty punk that's been scooping your paper, Marty. Why don't you sock him?" Marty's mouth got twisted worse than ever and he started biting his lips. When Danny got near him he all of a sudden ran out and hit him on the mouth. You could've knocked the fellows over with a feather. They didn't think Marty had guts enough to hit anybody.

Danny's lip was split right down

the middle and blood ran down his chin onto his shirt. He doubled up his fists and acted like he was going to sock Marty back and the fellows came closer. Danny didn't sock Marty, though. He just turned and walked away. If he had started to hit Marty the fellows would have piled him. The fellows got a kick out of ribbing Marty but they wouldn't stand for anyone picking on him. They were as nice a bunch of guys as you'd ever find.

After that every time Danny would come by the pool hall the fellows would yell, "Better run, Danny, here comes Marty." Then they'd all laugh and Danny would walk faster. Pretty soon he got so he wouldn't come by the pool hall any more. Danny was all right but he couldn't take a little kidding.

It made Marty cocky as hell. He went around town bragging about how he licked Danny and every time anybody wanted a laugh they'd say, "Hey, Marty, what'd you do to Danny?" and Marty'd stick out his chest and say, "I beat him up. Yeah, I beat him up." It sure made Danny's life miserable for him and it gave the fellows a lot of laughs.

One of the best jokes the fellows pulled on Marty was about Marge, the red-headed girl who worked at the coffee joint next to the station. It was a lulu of a joke and we had more darn fun, only Marty spoiled it. You'd have never thought Marty would do a thing like that but it just goes to show you how screwy he

was. The fellows started telling Marty that Marge was in love with him. At first he'd grin and say, "You can't kid *me*, you can't kid *me*. You're jus' kiddin', 'ats all." But the fellows kept it up. "Of course, she likes you, Marty," they'd say. "She's goofy about you. She *told* us so." "Did she?" Marty'd ask. "Did she, hones'?" and he'd lick his lips and look across at the coffee joint.

"I bet if you bought her some candy she'd fall hard for you," one of the fellows told him one day. "You think so?" Marty asked, all excited. "Sure," the fellow said. "Try it and see." So by God Marty did try it. Marge came walking by on her way to work one night and Marty popped out of the pool hall and stuck a bar of five-cent candy in her hand. "Here," he said, and started giggling. When he giggled his lips got all slobbery and he looked like he was blowing soap bubbles. The bar of candy was all squeezed up and dirty like Marty'd hung onto it in his pocket all afternoon. Gosh, the fellows roared. "Oh, Marge," they said, "who's your boy friend?" Marge's face got red's a beet. "It isn't funny," she said. "He means well. Thanks, Marty," she said, and walked away fast.

And maybe you think the fellows didn't razz Marge after that! "Hey, Marge," they'd yell, "how's your boy friend?" She'd flush and walk faster and it was always good for a laugh. Marty started hanging around

the coffee joint when Marge was working and the owner had to kick him out almost every night. Sometimes he'd give her a bar of candy and sometimes it'd be some flowers he'd swiped out of somebody's yard. She'd take 'em so's not to hurt his feelings but the fellows would play like she really was in love with him. Whenever they saw her they'd ask when was she getting married and things like that. Boy, did it burn her up!

Marty got so he thought Marge really was his girl. "Who's your girl, Marty?" the fellows would ask, and Marty would grin sly as the dickens and say, "Aw, *you* know, *you* know," and he'd giggle and bubbles would come on his mouth. Then the fellows would say, "Hey, Marty, we saw you out with another jane last night. What's the idea? Trying to ditch Marge?" Marty'd get all excited and beg 'em not to tell Marge that. Gosh, it was funny how serious he took the thing. "What do you and Marge do when you go out?" the fellows would ask, and Marty'd grin, "*You* know," he'd say, and then he'd lick his lips and look across the street where she worked.

It was the darnedest, funniest thing you ever saw, until Marty spoiled it. You never can tell what a goofy guy'll do and Marty was like the rest of 'em.

One night the fellows were hanging around the taxi stand in front of the pool hall when they heard a woman screaming like she'd been

murdered or something. Before they could figure out where it was coming from, Marge came running into the light out of the alley. Her dress was torn and her face was bloody like it'd been scratched. Her hair was down over her shoulders and she looked like she'd seen a ghost or something. Her eyes were bugged out and she didn't seem to see. She just screamed and screamed. Finally Ironsides found out what it was all about and the fellows all ran down the alley. She stood alone on the corner and kept on screaming. It was awful.

The fellows found Marty hiding behind a garbage can, crying. "I didn't mean to do it," he said. "Don't let them put me in jail." When they got him in jail and started asking him questions he acted like a kid that's been caught stealing candy or something. "I won't do it again," he said. He'd wipe his eyes with his fists and spread dirt all over his face. "Did she tell on me?" he'd ask.

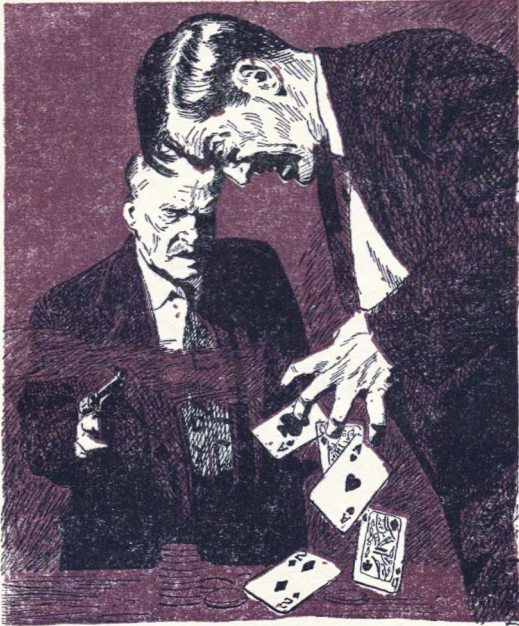
Of course they had to send Marty to the nut house at Stockton. They were afraid he'd bust loose again. He bawled like a kid for three days after they told him what they were going to do, until they took him away. What worried him was he'd be cooped up and wouldn't get to go up and down the streets selling papers. The deputy that took him to Stockton said he didn't fight. He just bawled like a kid.

What made the fellows sore about

the whole thing was the way Marge acted when she got out of the hospital. You know how women are. You never know what makes 'em click. Marge was that way. She got the notion the fellows were to blame. That's a hot one, isn't it? How could the fellows been to blame when they weren't anywhere near when it happened? It made them mad the way she started treating 'em. When they went into the coffee joint she treated 'em like dogs, wouldn't kid with them or anything. Never so much as a smile or a pleasant word. The fellows started staying away from the place, so the owner canned Marge. You couldn't blame him.

It seemed what Marty did to her and losing her job and all kind of made her screwy herself. Before she left town she met one of the fellows on the street and he told her he was sorry about her losing her job. "If you'd treated the fellows decent," he said, "the boss would of kept you." Well, sir, she scratched his face something awful, and he had to slap her good to make her quit. He wasn't the kind of fellow that hits women, but women haven't got a right to scratch a fellow's face when he hasn't done anything. Old Ironsides, the cop, agreed with the fellow. He told Marge to get out of town or he'd run her out.

The fellows sometimes say how funny it seems without Marty going up and down the streets yelling "Whoa! Whoa!" They sure used to get a kick out of him.



Old Willie

Cardina was a killer, and nobody had ever talked to him that way before. But Willie had a very special reason for being completely unafraid of killers.

BY WILLIAM P. MCGIVERN

THIS is a story I've heard told by old-timers around Chicago newspaper offices. They don't insist it's true, of course, since it hangs chiefly on the word of a reporter who was far more at home in speak-

was hard to say. Everyone at the boarding house liked him because of his obliging, courteous manner, and consistent good humor, but they didn't know very much about him; nor care a great deal.

easies than he ever was at a typewriter. Still, parts of the tale can't be explained away as the splintered dreams of a drunk. Maybe that's why the old-timers go on telling the story . . .

It begins in 1927, prohibition-time, when Chicago was run by a band of Sicilian immigrants under the austere leadership of a man named Al Capone. And it also begins when an amiable little man, whom everyone knew only as Old Willie, became interested in a shy Danish girl named Inger Anderson.

Willie was the handy man and janitor around the West Side boarding house where Inger roomed. He was a straight-backed, light-stepping character, with drooping gray mustache and pale blue eyes. He could have been in his middle sixties or seventies—it

Old Willie's interest in Inger was purely fatherly, of course. He knew she'd come from a Minnesota village and he felt she needed looking after in the big city. He fussed over her as if she were a baby. Inger was pretty capable despite her shyness, but she was touched by Old Willie's interest in her, and they became good friends.

Inger's ambition was to become a concert singer. She had a pleasant, untrained voice which wouldn't have excited a small-town choir-master, but she loved to sing and was ready to do almost anything to fulfill her dreams. She signed up for voice lessons in the evenings and found herself a job as a Hotel maid through an employment agency. She was thrilled at her luck in finding work so quickly. What she didn't know was that the employment agency director, spotting her as an earnest but unknowing Minnesota specimen, had assigned her to the hotel which was the Headquarters of the Capone mob — the old Star at Wabash Avenue near Twelfth Street. Considering this, considering that the Star was filled with as choice a collection of gorillas as were ever assembled under one roof, Inger got along okay for the first few weeks. She cleaned rooms, made beds, and kept her eyes cast down when the sharply-dressed torpedos stared insolently at her lovely, graceful figure and beautiful legs. One of the hoodlums, Blackie Cardina, a Sardinian with

alert eyes and a strong, bold jaw, stared longer than any of the others and then grinned.

Old Willie was horrified when Inger told him where she was working. They were talking in the parlor at the time. Inger had just finished her lessons and had been telling Old Willie about the skating and sledding in Minnesota, and about a boy named Lars who wanted to marry her, and then she said something about the Star Hotel.

"Listen, you get out of that place," Old Willie said, shaking his head sternly. "Those are bad men, worse than rattlesnakes, and it's no place for a girl like you."

Inger was amused by Willie's anxiety. She was young and very confident, and the thought that she couldn't look out for herself struck her as funny. After all, she reasoned, she had been at the Star a month and no one had bothered her yet.

About a week after this talk, Inger came home much later than usual and, went straight to her room. She didn't come down to eat, and she didn't practise her scales that night. Old Willie, vaguely troubled, tried to find out what was wrong, but she wouldn't open her door, or even talk to him. The next day the landlady brought Inger up some food, and talked to her for an hour or so. When she came out her eyes were red, and that night she glared at all the men boarders as if they were particularly repellent species of vermin.

For a month things went on this way. Inger wasn't working at the Star any more. She stuck close to her room and wouldn't see anyone, not even Old Willie. Then he learned from the landlady that Inger was leaving. She wasn't going home. She was just leaving.

That brought him to a decision. He went up and knocked firmly on the door. "You might as well open up," he said. "I'm sticking here until you do."

There was a wait, and then, in a tired voice, Inger told him to come in. She was in bed looking pale and ill. Old Willie sat beside her and patted her arm with a thin, long-fingered hand.

"You're in trouble, aren't you, Inger?" he said.

She looked away from him, staring out at the bare, black, winter trees.

"Who is it?" Old Willie said. Something had changed in his voice; it was curiously hard, insistent.

"I can't talk about it."

"You've got to, Inger. You got no father or brothers here."

She moaned softly. "They mustn't ever know."

"No need for that. Tell me about it."

Finally she told him, crying openly, her hand clutching his with desperate strength. It was the one they called Blackie, Blackie Cardina. He had followed her into a room, grinning. She had pleaded with him, begged him, and at last she had fought and screamed. But nothing

had made any difference to Blackie. He had taken what he wanted . . .

When she finished, Old Willie sighed. "I'll have a talk with him," he said.

"No, no," Inger cried. "They — he'd kill you. You don't know what they're like."

"Now don't worry about me," Old Willie said in a soothing voice. "You try to sleep, and don't be fretting."

And with that he left her. Old Willie went first to his own room and reappeared in a few minutes wearing a long, black frayed overcoat. The landlady met him at the foot of the stairs and asked him where he was going. Old Willie didn't answer. He walked past her, his eyes fixed straight ahead, a tense, angry frown on his old face.

Old Willie reached the Star Hotel a little after noon. He stopped inside the revolving doors, looking like some country bumpkin who'd got into the wrong pew by mistake. And now, right at this point, is where the drunken reporter, Jake Mackey, enters the story in the role of an eye-witness. Jake was at the Star that afternoon, sitting on a sofa and talking to one of Capone's men. Maybe Jake was on a story. Maybe he was just hanging around for a drink. Anyway, he was there, slightly drunker than usual, and he noticed Old Willie immediately, because Old Willie with his drooping mustaches and long black overcoat was a sight to catch and hold the eye.

Old Willie stopped a bellboy and asked him where he might find Blackie Cardina. The bellboy jerked his thumb toward a card game at the far end of the lobby. Blackie was there, sitting behind a high stack of chips, a cigar in his strong teeth, and grinning like a wolf because he was winning, and because, at that precise moment of his life, he thought the world was a place that had been kindly provided for him to loot, ravish, and otherwise do with as he pleased.

He glanced up a few seconds later and saw the old man with drooping mustaches studying him somberly. Blackie paid no attention to him; he had looked up as he figured the odds against filling a belly straight.

"Okay, I take a card," Blackie said, and snapped his fingers.

"Hold the deal," Old Willie said quietly. "Which of you is a rat called Blackie Cardina?"

Blackie looked up again, seeing Old Willie for sure this time, and his little dark eyes narrowed dangerously. "You aren't funny, old man," he said.

"I ain't trying to be," Old Willie said. "I'm a friend of a girl used to work here. You had your fun with her, you slimy snake-eating bastard, and now you're going to pay for it. I want a thousand dollars from you. That'll help her out some. And you can figure the price cheap."

Blackie got to his feet and it was difficult to judge from his expression whether he would start laughing or

cussing. "Look, old man, get out," he said, at last, pointing to the door. "Get out. You hear? I don't want to kick an old man into the street. I'll let you walk, understand." He got madder as he talked, and a flush of color surged up his throat and stained his dark features. "Get out!" he shouted. "Get out, you dirty, rotten old bum. Get out of here!"

"One thousand dollars," Old Willie said, casually unbuttoning his long black overcoat.

The kill-look in Blackie's eyes deepened. "Who sent you here? Who are you?" he shouted, and reached for the gun in his shoulder holster. "I'll teach you a lesson, goddamn it."

Old Willie said something then, something which only Jake Mackey seems to have heard, and he said it in a voice that was proud and hard and confident. After that, although it was all part of one, smoothly connected motion, Old Willie yelled, "Draw, you bastard!" and threw himself swiftly to one side in a low, springy crouch.

There was a lot of discussion later as to what exactly happened in the next few seconds. Two facts were incontrovertible: One, Old Willie somehow got a gun into his hand, and, two, Blackie Cardina fell across the card table with a black hole burned neatly into his forehead. No one actually saw Old Willie draw a gun. The onlookers decided later it was probably fastened to a

spring arrangement in his holster. Anyway, it got into his hand very fast, and the bullet from it got into Blackie's skull even faster.

Old Willie didn't let things get out of control. With a little wave of his big, old-fashioned revolver he backed Blackie's friends away from the table, and then coolly plucked a wallet from Blackie's hip pocket.

He inspected the contents and stuffed the wallet into a pocket of his overcoat. After that he backed toward the doors, moving easily and lightly, the gun in his hand as steady as something carved from rock.

Jake Mackey said there was something about Old Willie then, something in his eye and manner, that made you want to shrink down in your chair and stay very quiet.

At the doors Old Willie made a short speech. "Sit tight for five minutes. First man don't think that's a good idea is going to get himself killed."

And then he walked out into the street and for five minutes a half-dozen of Al Capone's hoodlums looked uneasily at Blackie's body, and occasionally glanced up at the clock above the lobby desk.

They weren't afraid to go outside, they said later. They weren't afraid of an old man in a tattered overcoat who'd been lucky enough to plug Blackie between the eyes. Still, they didn't go out and they didn't move.

Jake Mackey got on Old Willie's

trail right after the five minutes were up, and by checking the cab companies he found a hackie who had picked up an old party answering Willie's description at the intersections of Twelfth Street and Wabash Avenue. This took time, of course; it was late in the afternoon when Jake cautiously approached the boarding house where the cab driver had taken Old Willie and had dropped him.

And by then it was too late. Old Willie had been there, all right, but only long enough to give Inger a roll of money, and then pack up his few things and leave.

He didn't say goodbye to anyone, but simply strolled off down the darkening street, a slender old man with faded blue eyes and a curiously youthful stride. No one watched him leave.

Jake Mackey was fascinated by what he'd seen at the Star Hotel and he hung around Inger to get all the facts she could recall about Old Willie.

She told him how secretive Old Willie had always been, and how he liked to listen to her sing, and so forth, but she couldn't tell him very much more.

He and Inger became good friends in the next week or so, and for a while Jake even thought he was falling in love with her. But nothing came of that. Inger had a miscarriage a week later, and after that packed up and went back to Minnesota.

She married the boy named Lars.

and Jake carried the wedding announcement in his wallet, but finally lost it in a bar, the way clippings get lost in bars.

He never did pin down his story. He did a lot of checking on it, and spent a good deal of time in the library, but he never could prove it, and so he never wrote it.

Still, he *knew* that he had missed a great story by a hair's breadth, and in the years that followed he told the story around Chicago bars to anyone who would listen to him.

The thing that convinced him his story was true was the way Old Willie had handled that gun,

and what Old Willie had said when Blackie asked him who he was — Blackie had asked him who he was, remember, just before digging for the gun in his shoulder holster. Old Willie's answer had held no significance for the Sicilian immigrants at the card table, but it had raised the hairs on the back of Jake Mackey's neck.

Old Willie had said, in a proud, hard, confident voice, "When I was a kid they called me Billy."

And that's the way the old-timers tell Jake Mackey's story. They don't insist it's true, of course — but they go on telling it.



Build Another Coffin

The old lady was eccentric, but Jordan was sure there was more to it. Why was she avoiding her niece?

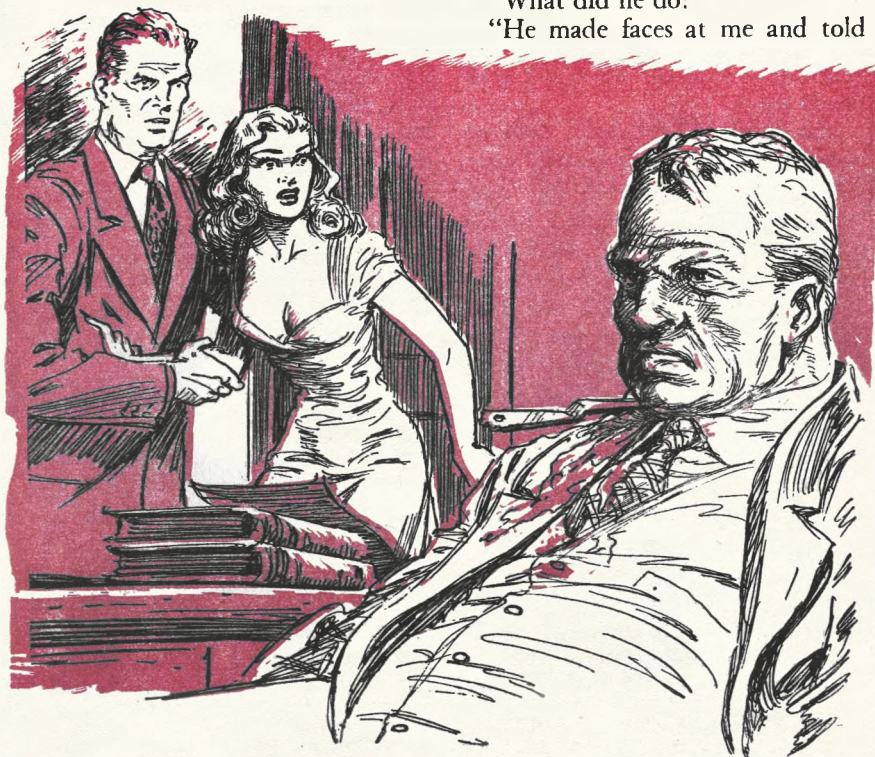
A Scott Jordan Story

BY HAROLD Q. MASUR

"HE'S CRAZY!" she said. "Stark, raving mad! How can they let such a man be a private detective? I never saw anybody act like him in all my life. Why, it's ridiculous! He simply hasn't got all his buttons. Do you know what he did, Mr. Jordan?"

"What did he do?"

"He made faces at me and told



me to go home." She expelled a short gasp of utter frustration.

"Please, Mrs. Denney," I said, "try to relax."

"Relax?" Her voice went up a full octave. "How can I after talking to such a lunatic?"

What she needed was a shot of brandy to quiet her nerves. I reached behind me into the telephone table and got out the office bottle and poured. "Say when." But she seemed to have lost her voice, or else she was very thirsty, because I had to quit pouring in order to save my good Napoleon brandy from slopping over the rim of the glass onto the lap of my gray tweed pants.

She drank it like water, with no perceptible effect. Her nostrils were still distended, her bosom continued to heave, and she couldn't find a comfortable spot in the red leather client's chair. She had walked unannounced into my office ten minutes before. Her name was Grace Denney and she was married, which seemed a bit unfair, since an architectural design like hers isn't constructed every day and ought not to be taken out of circulation, though I couldn't blame any man for wanting an exclusive on it.

She was tall, a lithe, sleek, supple item, slender at the hips, rising like an hourglass to emerge burstingly from the square-cut neckline of a simple dress, wondrously and sumptuously assembled. When you came to her face, reluctantly, you saw

luminous brown eyes and cherry-red lips, full and shining. From Cleopatra on down, she had them all stopped. Whatever you might need, wherever you were, she had it, in spades. It made no difference, your age or your physical condition, here was a girl who could put spring in an old man's legs and fire in a young man's blood.

Emotional pressure had made her story a little disjointed. I had gathered only that she was from California, that she had written to a private detective named Lester Britt, asking him to find out why an aunt of hers never answered any letters, that she had arrived yesterday, paid a visit on Mr. Britt, and found his behavior most unorthodox, to say the least.

The brandy, I saw, was beginning to work. She settled back in the chair, breathing easier.

"That's better," I said. "Now, Mrs. Denney, let's get the facts untangled. This aunt of yours, tell me about her."

She moistened her lips. "Aunt Paula. Mrs. Paula Larsen. She's a widow, about eighty, I'd say, maybe more. She lives at the Vandam Nursing Home on Long Island."

"Who supports her?"

"Supports her?" Grace Denney snorted politely. "Aunt Paula has annuities that pay her at least five hundred dollars a week. Her husband was my mother's brother. Oscar Larsen, the candy man. Larsen's Fine Chocolates. Stores all over

the country. He put all his money into annuities before he retired. And shortly afterward he died.”

“You say you haven’t heard from your aunt?”

“Not since she entered that nursing home.”

“How long ago?”

“About two years.”

I looked at her curiously. “And you weren’t concerned about it until recently?”

She hastened to defend herself. “Let me explain. I used to live with Aunt Paula, until I met Charles. Charles Denney, my husband.” She paused, waiting for me to comment. When I remained silent, she raised a delicate eyebrow. “You never heard of Charles Denney?”

“Should I have?”

“He’d probably think so. Charles was in pictures, until the movies found their tongue. After that he just couldn’t seem to click. All they’d give him were minor roles, small bits where he didn’t have to talk much. It was quite a blow to Charles. He still fancies himself as an actor and thinks that there is a great Hollywood conspiracy against him.”

“Where did you meet him?”

“Here in New York. Aunt Paula didn’t like him at all. She thought he was too old for me.” Grace Denney twisted her mouth wryly. “Which he was, of course, but I was too stubborn at the time. Aunt Paula was furious when I went to California with him. She swore she’d

never talk to me until I was single again. I wrote once or twice, but she didn’t answer, and then I heard indirectly that she had entered this Vandam Nursing home. About a month ago I started writing to her, with no results at all.”

“Is that so surprising?” I asked. “You’re not single again, are you?”

“No, but I’m going to be. I intend to sue Charles for divorce. I thought that would please Aunt Paula, and I was very surprised when she didn’t answer my letters.”

“So you hired a private detective, this Lester Britt.”

“That’s right.”

“Why?”

“Because I was worried.”

“About what?”

She shrugged vaguely, a troubled look in her eyes. “I can’t say exactly. I really don’t know. It’s just something I feel. And now with this private detective acting so peculiar. . . .” She let her voice dwindle uncertainly and caught her full bottom lips between her teeth.

“Who recommended you to this Lester Britt?”

“Nobody. I found his number in a Manhattan directory at the Telephone Exchange.”

“What else did he say besides tell you to go home?”

“He said Aunt Paula never wanted to see me again, that she still hated me.” Grace Denney’s mouth tightened. “I don’t believe it.”

“Why didn’t you try to see her?”

"I did." Bafflement squirmed in tiny wrinkles across her forehead. I went straight out to that Nursing Home on Long Island. The place is built like a fortress. I spoke to Dr. Albert Vandam, who runs the Home. He told me to wait in the office while he spoke to Aunt Paula. After a few minutes he came back, shrugging his shoulders. He said that she had developed an obsession. She absolutely refused to see me."

"All right," I said. "I'm a lawyer. What do you want me to do?"

She looked surprised. "Whatever lawyers are supposed to do in such cases. If Aunt Paula has become senile, if she's incompetent to handle her own affairs, don't you think a guardian ought to be appointed?"

"No doubt about it," I said. "Who's supposed to inherit her money?"

"I am. It was all arranged by Uncle Oscar when he set up the annuities."

I looked at her with fresh respect. For looks and personality she already headed the list. Now she rated high on the financial scale too. I smelled a generous fee in the air. Though I would have handled her case anyhow, for a smile and a smaller fee.

"You have just retained yourself a lawyer, Mrs. Denney," I said and stood up. "Suppose we pay a visit on this Lester Britt and see what he has to say for himself."

She abandoned the chair with alacrity, a sudden smile warming

her face. I got the full brunt of it and I could feel it all the way down to my shoes. "That's what I like," she said, "a man of action."

We left the office together and she tucked her arm through mine with an easy familiarity, as if we had known each other a long time. She kept step with me across the lobby and I wasn't ashamed to be seen with her. I could feel her pulsing aliveness and the fluid grace of her body.

But not for long.

She gave a sudden start and I felt her stiffen at my side. Then she jerked free and her heels clicked a sharp tattoo on the sidewalk as she steered straight for a man holding up the side of the building. I followed.

"Are you spying on me, Charles?" she demanded acidly. Her eyes were hot and her voice was cold. "When did you come to New York?"

He made a pacifying gesture and smiled affably. "Arrived yesterday, on the same train you did, my sweet." He flicked his eyes significantly in my direction. "Could I talk to you alone, love?"

"No," she snapped rudely. "We're all washed up, Charles. I told you that months ago when I left the bungalow. Besides, I'm busy now. This is my lawyer, Scott Jordan." She indicated the man with a carelessly deprecating gesture. "My husband, Charles Denney."

"How do you do," I said.

"Fine," he said.

I understood now why he would never be a success in talking pictures. There was nothing wrong with his diction, nor with his charm. He looked like an aging playboy, but he spoke like the head chamberlain in a harem.

Grace Denney said between her teeth, "If you insist upon following me, Charles, I'll complain to the police. That kind of publicity can hurt your career. Good-bye."

He tried to detain her. He reached for her arm. She swung around furiously and slapped his face. A red welt blossomed on his cheek. He cried out in a thin womanly bleat and slapped her back. She gasped and looked stunned.

"Here," I said. "Let's have no more of that."

He turned on me, teeth bared. "You stay out of it. She's my wife."

A crowd of curious onlookers had begun to collect. I took her elbow firmly and said, "Let's go, Grace."

Charles Denney surprised me. He struck out at the point of my jaw, and the sonovagun was in good condition. My head snapped back with a stab of pain. He was begging for it, so I obliged. I grinned wolfishly and aimed one at his stomach. It was a good shot and I felt my fist sink in to the wrist. Denney's lungs collapsed like a punctured balloon, and the fight went out of him. He leaned against the building, his face pasty.

I turned and walked Grace to the curb and yanked open the door of a

waiting cab, got her installed, climbed in beside her, and the driver gave it the gun. His engine roared and we spurred away.

He swiveled his head. "Hey, you ever fight professionally?"

"Golden gloves."

"Look, buddy, you got a lot of promise in them dukes. I know a manager who can —"

"No soap," I told him. "I'm perfectly satisfied with my own racket."

He looked pained. "Okay," he said. "Where we going?"

"Give him the address, Grace."

It was all the way down on Park Row, one of those ancient musty seedy buildings that had served its purpose and was marking time until the wreckers pulled it down. Lester Britt had an office on the third floor. The naked-ribbed elevator cage took us up, squealing and groaning on its cables. The hall hadn't seen a janitor's mop in months. Grace made a rabbit's nose and stepped quickly and lightly to a frosted glass door with Britt's name and the legend: *Investigations*.

She turned the knob and went in. I was right at her heels when she stopped short and I had to clamp my brakes to keep from knocking her over. She was making sick, gurgling noises and trying to back-track, but I was in the way. Then she turned and buried her face against my shoulder, clinging to me, trembling along the full length of her body. Another time this might have been a pleasant experience.

Not now. Not with this sight.

Now I could see over her shoulder. I saw Mr. Lester Britt, private eye, seated behind his desk, with a letter opener sticking out of his throat at right angles. The blade had failed to seal his wound. His jugular had spurted like a punctured wine gourd, and the whole front of his vest was sticky and viscous with the blood from his emptied veins.

He was a small man with a round face and a balding head. His eyes were glazed and his lips skinned back, leaving his teeth naked to the gums. I knew the kind of private eye he was. His office and everything about him told me. You can buy them for a dollar a dozen, the divorce specialists, the transom peepers, the deadbeat dicks hounding wage slaves who can't meet the last installment on a set of Grand Rapids furniture worth exactly ten percent of the sale price. Lester Britt, with a license in his pocket and a tin badge that permitted him to park anywhere he liked, providing he paid the fine. He had taken a job and bucked some customers who were too fast for him. A knife or a bullet or a broken skull, this was bound to happen to him sooner or later.

Grace Denney was still shivering in my arms like a woman suffering from malaria. But she hadn't screamed and I was thankful for that. "All right," I said close to her ear. "Let's get out of here." I almost had to carry her.

I held her hand in the elevator and it was cold as ice. Our first stop was a bar across the street, a small oasis with booths and checkered tableclothes.

"Two double brandies," I told the waiter.

"I'll take the same," she said.

He gave her a double-take, blinking in surprise, then shrugged and shuffled off to fill the order. I told her to wait and went up front to patronize the telephone booth. I made an anonymous call to Headquarters and hung up. I was in no mood to stick around for a long investigation, trying to convince them I didn't know the answers to any of their questions.

Back at the table, I said, "You all right, Grace?"

She swallowed hugely and nodded.

"Good," I said. "Now listen to me. I have a hunch. What happened to Britt is probably the result of handling your case. That's why he got all worked up when you suddenly appeared at his office yesterday. Chances are he learned something he didn't want you to know. And I think the explanation can be found at the Vandam Nursing Home. I'm going out there."

She tossed off the second brandy like an aspirin tablet. It settled her nerves and put some of the color back in her cheeks. "Can I go along?" she asked.

"If you'll stay in the car and let me handle it."

She nodded quickly. "Of course."

I paid the check and we took a cab uptown to the garage and I got out the Buick. We drove across the Queensboro Bridge, heading out towards the South Shore. Grace Denney was silent, her eyes remote, sitting prim and straight, with her hands folded stiffly in her lap and the wind whipping back through her lustrous ebony hair.

At this time of the day traffic was light and the parkway unraveled swiftly under our wheels. Overhead, the sky was clear, a canopy of rich cobalt, and presently I spied a few seagulls wheeling against the horizon and I knew we were approaching the sea. I saw directions and turned off the main artery and drove along a very narrow macadam road. Every now and then a flash of blue water reeled past and the crisp tang of salt was in the air.

This was a choice expanse of realty, with entrenched wealth in fifteen room chateaus, looking out on their own private botanical gardens.

"This is it," Grace said, stirring at my side.

All I saw was a six foot wall into the top of which had been cemented chunks of broken glass. A pole vaulter might scale the barrier, but the average trespasser would most likely try another route.

"Where's the entrance?" I asked.

"Around the bend."

I pulled up near a wrought iron gate that hung open between a pair of concrete columns, and debarked.

I stuck my head through the window on the other side. "I'll try not to be long," I said.

"Be careful," she said, and took my face between her palms and leaned towards me. It was supposed to be a simple kiss of encouragement. But something happened. Our lips met and the contact triggered a whole set of electrical impulses that went through me like a searing flame.

Call it chemistry, anything you like. Sometimes, rarely, it just happens this way. We were a pair of catalytic agents working on each other. The hunger must have been building up inside her for a long time, like a full head of steam in a boiler. A sob caught at her throat and there was a soft sighing exhalation. Her mouth opened on mine, our breaths intermingled, and her fingernails gouged into my shoulders and for a moment there I thought she was going to haul me right through the closed door into the car. Her body seemed to grow tense and I felt my knees grow wobbly.

And then I remembered Lester Britt, sitting up in his office chair, with that piece of steel sticking in his throat, and I broke her grip. It took a bit of doing, but I managed it.

"Not now," I said shakily. "There's work to be done."

She leaned back, her breathing erratic and shallow, her eyes smoldering, unwilling to trust her voice.

I took a long breath and touched her lightly on the cheek and walked past the wrought iron gates along a graveled drive. The building broke into view as I came around a bend. It was dark brown, turreted, solid as a fortress, its leaded panes glinting dully in the late afternoon sun. A heavy oaken door was closed and looked impregnable. There was no bell, no knocker, nothing but a pull cord, which I gave a hard tug.

The door opened wide enough to show me a female face as thin as a hatchet and just as sharp. She was a tall, muscular woman, forty or so, in a starched white nurse's uniform. She was in the wrong profession. The milk of human kindness had long since curdled in her eyes.

"Yes?" Her voice was short and reedy. "What is it?"

"Dr. Vandam, please."

"The doctor's busy," she said unpleasantly and started to close the door in my face.

But I had my foot in the doorway and she looked down at it, surprised. I put some steel into my voice. "Dr. Vandam," I said. "Don't make me ask you again. Where is he?"

She gave me a look of cold hostility, turned on her heel, and said abrasively, "This way."

I followed her through a wide lobby and down an uncarpeted corridor to another oaken door. She knocked on this, opened it, and said, "This person wishes to see you, doctor. He practically forced his way in."

Dr. Vandam stood up from behind his desk, a bony man with an angular face, aggrieved eyes, and a perpetually worried mouth. This was the expression he presented to the public. What went on behind it, I couldn't even guess. "Come in, sir," he said in a deceptively mild voice. "Come in and sit down." He pulled a chair around so that the light would strike my face. "You mustn't mind Miss Kirk," he said. "We're short-handed and she has to do most of the work." He peered at me owlishly. "I don't believe I've ever seen you before. Are you selling something?"

"Not exactly, doctor." I had ignored the proffered chair. "I came to see one of your patients."

"Yes?"

"Mrs. Paula Larsen."

There was no visible change in his expression. "Are you a relative?"

"No, doctor."

"Friend of the family?"

"No, doctor."

He moved his shoulders patiently. "Then what is the purpose of your visit, if I may inquire? Mrs. Larsen is resting now. She had a touch of flu last month and she's very weak."

"I'd like to talk to her."

He smiled patronizingly. "My dear fellow, we can't allow just anyone to walk in and disturb our guests. Surely you realize that."

I fished one of my cards out of my wallet and gave it to him. His lips moved as he read it. His eyes came up without any expression.

"I see," he said. "You're a lawyer. What, exactly, do you want, counselor? Who do you represent?"

"Mrs. Grace Denney. We want to find out if Mrs. Larsen is competent to handle her own affairs."

He stroked his closed eyelids with infinite weariness. "Ah, yes. Mrs. Denney was here yesterday, but Mrs. Larsen refused to see her." He shoved his chair back abruptly and came to his feet. "I think an interview can be managed. Suppose we just walk in on Mrs. Larsen. But please make it brief, counselor. Follow me." His manner had turned crisp and businesslike.

A spiral staircase wound upward to the second floor. Our footsteps were absorbed on the well-padded broadloom. Dr. Vandam paused at the end of the corridor, opened a door, and walked in with a cheerful smile.

"Well, Mrs. Larsen, you're looking chipper. How do you feel this afternoon?"

"Resting nicely, doctor. I—" She stopped when she noticed he was not alone and her faded eyes regarded me curiously.

I saw a small woman, very old, lying in a four poster, dwarfed by its hugeness. Her skin was wrinkled parchment and her hair was snow white. Only the porcelain dentures anchored to her gums kept her mouth from collapsing upon itself.

"I brought you a visitor," Dr. Larsen said.

She searched my face, probing,

trying to recollect if she knew me.

"How do you do, Mrs. Larsen," I said. "I'm a friend of Grace's."

The gnarled fingers tightened on the coverlet and her withered lips contracted. "Then you're no friend of mine," she said.

"Grace would like very much to see you, Mrs. Larsen."

"Well, I don't want to see her. Why doesn't she leave me alone and go back to California?"

I said quietly, "She's divorcing Charles."

Her eyes closed, as if the light hurt them. "Poor Charles. Grace must have made him very unhappy."

"Please," Dr. Vandam broke in firmly. "I'm sorry, but you can see that Mrs. Larsen is very tired. She needs rest and this excitement isn't doing her any good."

I smiled, first at him, then at her, and now I gave them both the shock of their lives.

"That's too goddam bad about her," I said unpleasantly. "Get up out of that bed, you old fraud. And get some clothes on, unless you want me to drag you down to Police Headquarters in your nightgown."

Her mouth fell open. She gaped at me, dumbfounded, her eyes dark with apprehension and dismay. Dr. Vandam stood with his spine arched, his larynx paralyzed, speechless and staring. There were incoherent sounds in his throat that finally became words:

"What — what — what is the meaning of this?"

I was playing a hunch and I hoped I was right.

I said with acid precision, "Who do you think you're kidding? This isn't Mrs. Larsen. This woman is a phoney, a substitute, a ringer."

His Adam's apple bobbed erratically. "But Mrs. Larsen — where —"

"Dead, probably," I said. "And kept a secret so this old bag could take her place."

He seemed at a complete loss. "I — I don't understand. Why?"

"In order to keep receiving those annuity payments. Five hundred smackers a week. Twenty-five thousand a year. It adds up, friend. If they could get away with it for only four years it's a hundred grand." I looked at her stonily. "Get up, lady. You won't have long to spend in jail. You're too old."

"But she wasn't as old as she looked. She kicked her feet over the side of the bed and stood up, trembling and agitated. Her mouth was working and her quivering finger pointed at the doctor.

"He made me do it!" she shouted. "He hired me and asked me to play the part. I don't know about any annuities. I don't —"

Vandam cut her short with a snarl. "Shut up!" His eyes were glazed, abnormally bright as he turned on me, trying to pull himself erect. "These premises are private. You have no right here."

But it was only surface courage, an attitude of desperation. Inside, he

was demoralized. He knew the game was up.

"You didn't coach her well enough," I said. "Mrs. Larsen never told you about Grace and Charles, or why she had fought with her niece. She slipped on that one."

The muscles in his angular face were out of control, warping his mouth.

"Mrs. Larsen died," I said. "You thought she was alone in the world. She never told you about Grace. It must have been a shock when the letters started coming. Because the die had already been cast. She was dead and you thought you saw a chance to make some easy money. Instead of reporting it, you buried her quietly and secretly out in the garden somewhere. You accepted the checks and counterfeited her signature on the indorsements." I showed him my teeth. "Or did greed make you impatient, doctor? Perhaps you couldn't wait for her to die from old age. Maybe you accelerated the event. An autopsy will tell that part of the story when the police find her."

Pallor diluted his complexion. Whatever control he had left was rapidly dissolving, disorganizing his thoughts. He sought desperately to salvage some remnants of his honor. "No, no," he whispered hoarsely, "it — it wasn't me. I didn't kill her. She received a box of chocolates in the mail." He swallowed painfully, like a man with the mumps. "Arsenic. I kept the wrapper."

"Where did the candy come from?"
"San Diego."

"I believe you," I said. "You didn't kill Mrs. Larsen. It was somebody else. But just the same you're going to sit in that electric chair up in Sing Sing."

He staggered back, cringing away from me. Beads of sweat condensed along his brow. His nostrils were pinched and gray.

"You killed somebody else," I said. "Lester Britt. He was hired to find out why the old lady had failed to answer any letters. He investigated and fell onto your scheme and started to blackmail you. That was all right, until Grace Denney arrived in New York. Britt was panicked. He was a small timer who had an easy touch and he was afraid the girl would put an end to it. So he came to you, for a quick kill, trying to up the ante. You understood about blackmailers, doctor. You knew that sort of thing was endless. It got progressively worse. You were desperate. Britt had to be eliminated. So you went to his office and you did what had to be done. And you hired this old lady in case the girl asked someone else to investigate."

His lips moved soundlessly. The truth was there in his distorted face for anyone to see. He backed away blindly through the door.

I didn't bother to chase after him. What the hell for? If he wanted to commit suicide, let him. It would save the State a lot of trouble.

I looked at the old lady. "Get away from here," I told her. "Get away from here as fast as you can."

I took the same advice for myself.

I was halfway to the car when I heard the shot, a muffled report, absorbed in space.

Dr. Vandam had appealed his case to a higher authority.

Grace was waiting in the car, with the radio playing. Dinner music from some hotel, soft and muted. There were people who still led normal lives. I climbed in beside her and started the car. She twisted around to face me while I drove.

"What is it?" she asked. "You look strange. Did you see Aunt Paula?"

"No," I said.

"But you spoke to Dr. Vandam."

"Yes," I said.

She clutched urgently at my sleeve. "What happened, Scott?"

I ignored the question and asked one of my own. "Do you ever go to San Diego, Grace?"

Her forehead was puckered. "Occasionally. I have friends there. Why?"

"How about Charles? Does he ever go there?"

"I imagine so. It isn't too far from Hollywood."

"I'd like to talk to him. Where do you think he's staying?"

"At the Selwyn, probably, on East 48th Street. What is it, Scott? Please tell me."

"Later," I said. "I want to think for a moment."

I drove back to Manhattan too fast and too recklessly. When we reached our destination, I parked in the only space available, beside a fire hydrant.

We entered the lobby and Grace got Denney's room number from the desk clerk. An elevator took us up to the eighth floor. I stood to one side when she knocked.

His voice came through, sounding cautious. "Who is it?"

"It's me, Charles, Grace. Please open the door."

No key could have opened the door so quickly. A smile of welcome was forming on his face. It died when he saw me and he started to slam the door shut. I hit it with my shoulder, driving him backward into the room. He tried to stop me but couldn't.

His mouth hardened. "Now look here, shyster —"

Even in the lexicon of a mule skinner there is no epithet more calculated to make my blood go to the boiling point.

"A bit of chocolates," I said to him. "Sent from San Diego, California, to the Vandam Nursing Home. Just an innocent box of chocolates."

The words hit him like a physical blow. I could read the look of doom in his suddenly transformed face.

For a moment he stood rigid, the muscles pulling his face out of shape, and then he spun away from me toward a kitchenette at the rear. He had the bread knife out before I

could grab him. He brandished it aloft, like a hammer in his fist.

Grace's hands flew to her mouth, plugging up the scream which was forcing itself out.

I backed slowly away, talking to him.

"A box of chocolates," I said. "You sent them to Mrs. Larsen, spiked with arsenic."

He didn't speak. His eyes were live coals, searing with hate. He stood motionless, the long steel saw-toothed blade glittering under the light.

"California has a community property law," I said. "Each spouse is entitled to half the property. You knew that Grace was planning to get a divorce, and you poisoned her aunt so she would inherit without delay. But Vandam crossed you up. He kept the death a secret."

Charles Denney moved then. He sprang forward and the knife made a flashing arc that would have laid me open like a side of beef.

I threw myself sideways and felt a burning flame along my arm. I stumbled and fell and rolled over on my back. Denney was over me now, breathing hoarsely, nothing human in his eyes. He raised the blade for a final thrust. But he waited a second too long.

My feet caught him at the pit of the stomach, with all the leverage of the powerful muscles a man has in his thighs.

Denney went up in the air and flew backward, crashing against the

wall. I scrambled to my feet and reached him in a single jump. His eyes were glazed and I picked one up from the basement and threw it at him with all the strength I had. I never threw anything harder.

It nailed him along the side of his jaw and he toppled over with a grunt and lay still.

I kicked the knife away. "It's all over," I told Grace. "Take it easy."

But she had no intention of fainting. "Shall I call the police?"

"If you please."

It took almost an hour to set them straight on the story. When they finally released us, I took Grace's arm and led her out to the elevator.

"Have I earned a fee?"

"You certainly have," she said emphatically.

"Okay. I'm taking you home to collect."

I felt pretty good. I didn't even get mad when I found a cop downstairs writing out a parking ticket for my Buick.

I merely asked him to hurry.



MANHUNT'S

Movie of the Month:

I Confess

Directed by

ALFRED HITCHCOCK

Starring

MONTGOMERY CLIFT

ANNE BAXTER

KARL MALDEN

BRIAN AHERNE



A prominent lawyer is murdered in Quebec. A man disguised in the full length cassock of a priest is witnessed hurrying from the murder site by two little girls. The murderer confesses his crime to his parish priest. But the priest, his lips sealed by the sanctity of the confession, is unable to speak out and reveal the identity of the killer, even though his own life, and the reputation of a woman, are at stake.

Filmed in the stone-walled capital of Canada's Province of Quebec — the only place on the North American continent where priests wear cassocks (an indispensable element in the identification of the murder suspect) — "I Confess" is Hitchcock at his best. Building his taut suspense drama around the excellent performances of three past Academy Award winners (Clift, Baxter, and Malden), utilizing the scenic beauty and inhabitants of the ancient French city to their fullest extent, Hitchcock has loaded this Warner Brothers film with tight, edge-of-the-seat action.

For these reasons, Manhunt selects "I Confess" as its movie of the month. Don't miss it!



Don't Go Near

A John J. Malone novelette

BY CRAIG RICE

Malone had had some peculiar clients in his time, but his current one was really a dilly. The client was a 550-pound carnival lion.

*"Don't go near that lion's cage,
Mother dear, tonight —"*

THE GIRL stepped close to John J. Malone and said softly "You're singing it wrong. It's *'them lion cage.'*"

The little Chicago lawyer wheeled around, started to say "Sorry, the lion is busy," thought better of it, and stared at her. She was lovely, she was blonde, and she looked like a small-scale lady lion. A kitten-sized lion, Malone decided.

"It goes this way, Mr. Malone," she whispered. She was about five foot one with her shoes on. She smiled and sang,

*"Don't go near them lion cage,
Mother dear, tonight,
Them lions is excited
And you know that they could
bite —"*

Malone came right back at her with:

*"When they get them awful fits,
They'll chew you into little
bits —"*

She laughed, and said, "We seem to have come out of the same circus. Let's be friends. I have a feeling you'll need one. Want to meet one of your clients?"

It was a small tent show, in a smaller town. Malone let the girl lead him over ropes, around tent stakes, past canvas, and, finally, to the cages.

"There he is," the girl said, "and

his name is Leopold. My name, in case you care, is Bitsy. Short for Itsy Bitsy, on account of I'm so tall. Let's you make friends with your client." She started to unlock the door to the cage.

"We can make friends just as well through the bars," Malone said hastily, grabbing her hand.

Leopold gave the lawyer a nasty look. Malone gave it right back to him. He hoped his breath wasn't as bad as Leopold's. He reached a tentative hand through the bars and said, hesitantly, "Nice kitty."

Leopold growled that the next person who said "nice kitty," to him was going to have his right arm chewed off. He added a remark in a growl that was heard half-way to Gary, Indiana, backed off into a corner of the cage, cuddled his head on one paw, and snarled a goodbye.

"To know him is to love him," Bitsy said. "All 550 pounds of him. You'd better come and meet Pops."

"Since he's paying for this," Malone said acidly, "perhaps I'd better."

She led him through the lot to one of an assortment of trailers, a fancy one painted with red and green stripes, and adorned with a gaudy sign that read "Hardcastle's Circus."

"Pops!" she called, as she pushed open the door.

Malone's eyes adjusted themselves to the dim light. The interior of the trailer was a neat little room with a spotless kitchenette, two

easy chairs, a studio couch, and half-a-hundred photographs of lions pasted on the plywood walls.

Pops rose from one of the easy chairs to meet them. Malone's first thought was that he was at least nine feet tall. At a second glance he scaled it down to a mere six foot four. Pops Hardcastle had a crop of snow white hair as thick as a lion's mane, and a haggard face that was, right now, wet with tears.

"You're Mr. Malone. Good." New tears began to flow. "Mr. Malone, someone is killing my cats." He reached under his plaid wool shirt for a dirty wallet. "You'll want a down payment, a retainer, a — what-you-call it —"

"Later," Malone said. He was beginning to feel uncomfortably cold. What had possessed him to come out here chasing wild geese, to find himself among maniacs and wild animals?

"Mr. Malone, I loved those cats. And they died. They were *killed*. It's not the money. Heaven knows, you can live without money. It takes a lot of money to replace a big cat these days, but — who would deliberately kill one? Bitsy showed you Leopold — would you kill a cat like that?" The tears began to run down his face again.

"Take it easy, Pops," Bitsy said from the door.

"It must be some crazy person," Pops said. He blew his nose.

"Blow one for me," Malone said quietly, "and tell me the story."

Pops blew his nose again. Malone said, "Thank you," and shut up.

"Tell you, hell," Pops said. "I'll show you. Maybe you'd best have a drink first —"

Malone said, "Gin, straight, and thanks."

It was behind the trailer, under a tarpaulin. A dead lion.

Once that lion had roared his way through the jungle — or sneered at visitors in the zoo. Or travelled with a small-time circus. Now, he was dead, and the late October flies swarmed over his body. King of the Beasts, dead in the dirt behind a cheap trailer, and with only the moon to mourn him.

"His name," Pops Hardcastle said reverently, "was Goliath."

"Cause of death unknown," Malone murmured. "Now, talk."

"He was killed," Hardcastle said, "he was *murdered!*" He drew a long, slow breath. "All right, Mr. Malone. Someone is killing my cats. Maybe Leopold next. The first —" He drew another breath. "It was in a suburb of Columbus. Maybe you understand, Mr. Malone, we don't play big cities but —"

"Go on," Malone said, savagely chewing on his cigar, and trying to keep his eyes away from the murdered Goliath.

"Maybe we'd better talk this over in my office," Pops Hardcastle said. His face was beginning to pale.

"Maybe we'd better talk it over right here," Malone said.

"This lioness — her name was

Linda. I named her that because she was so beautiful —”

“Keep talking,” Malone said.

“She was beautiful — beyond belief. Golden. Pure gold. But she died — she was murdered, Malone. And so was Goliath. And Leopold will be next.” His grey face began to turn more grey. “Mr. Malone, I love my cats —” His knees began to buckle. “And if someone is killing them —”

Malone caught him as he fell.

“He’s not dead,” Malone said, fifteen minutes later. “He — he just wanted to lie down for a while.”

The little blonde girl grabbed his hand. “His heart —”

“It’s beating,” Malone told her. He hoped his own was. “And where did you put that gin?”

Somewhere in the distance, Leopold roared.

“He’ll sleep for a while,” Bitsy whispered. She pulled a blanket over the old man. “And we can talk.” She stuck the bottle of gin in the pocket of her blue jeans, and led Malone out to the steps of the trailer, where they sat in the warm autumn sunlight.

“Mr. Malone,” she began, “Pops has no money.”

“Neither have I,” Malone told her, “but we have a bottle of gin, and I have a roof over my head tonight. Or have I?”

She grinned at him. “You have. Right next to the lion’s cage.” She grabbed his hand, pulled him to his feet, and said “We go this-a-way.”

She stuck the gin back in the pocket of her blue jeans and added “While we’re at it, you might like to meet a few people.”

Malone heard a roar that didn’t come from the lion’s cage. It was the roar of a hot motor, and hot tires. It grew louder. “Follow me,” Bitsy screamed in his ear.

The building ahead of them looked like an upturned mixing bowl. Bitsy led the way up a flight of steps to the top of it. The roar was deafening, now, and there was a smell of burning rubber. Malone clutched a flimsy little railing and looked down.

II

Seen from the inside, it was an inverted bowl, painted black. Horizontal to the sun, the motordrome rider, a figure in white, rode a speed-maddened motorcycle around the arena. Malone closed his eyes. The small crowd clapped and cheered. The noise lessened, died away altogether. Bitsy took Malone’s arm and led him down the stairs.

“You might like to meet her,” Bitsy said.

“Her?” Malone said feebly. A few minutes later he said to himself “I don’t believe it,” and almost forgot that Bitsy was on the same earth.

The speed demon was tall, graceful, platinum haired, and lovely. Her deep-set eyes were the color of the inside of a rifle barrel. She gave

Malone a smile guaranteed to set the world spinning and said, "I'm so glad you like my act."

Bitsy said breathlessly, "Mr. Malone is a circus fan. He's spending a few days with us, just for the fun of it."

"Wonderful," the speed demon said. "My name, Mr. Malone, is Marguerite, in case you care. Perhaps you'll take me out to dinner sometime. I don't always dress like this." She indicated her white open-collar shirt, her white polo pants, and her high black boots with a deprecating gesture. "And what do you think of our murdered lions?"

"I think they're dead," Malone said fast, "And I'll see you later."

"If she did it," Bitsy said, as they walked across the lot, "I hope they hang her. Or, what is the penalty for murdering lions, Malone? And *are* you going to take her out to dinner?"

"Meow," Malone said coyly. "Where to now?"

"We're going to see a magician," Bitsy said, "and don't say, It's about time!"

The magician's tent was decorated with improbable-looking cross sections of skulls and highly colored palms.

"Mr. Nemo doesn't like me too well," Bitsy said, "account of, I'm Pops' adopted daughter, and he's had a falling-out with Pops. So maybe you'd better go in alone." She added, "He's also a veterinary."

Malone sighed, and pushed his

way into the tent. It was dressed up with more illustrations of skulls and palms, plus a fairly good reproduction of The Tree of Life, and a highly colored, ornate study of the human digestive tract. Mr. Nemo, a short, plump, pink-faced little man with curly silver hair, rubbed his rosy hands together in a washing motion, and asked Malone to tell him his troubles.

"You're the one with troubles," Malone said, deciding on a bold move. He fished out a battered card, handed it over and said, "I understand you need a lawyer."

Mr. Nemo turned pale, turned pink again, and said, "That so-and-so Hardcastle. He thinks I killed his so-and-so lions."

"Did you?" Malone asked pleasantly.

"If I had," Mr. Nemo said, "I'd have chopped them up and shoved them down his gullet. I nursed them lions through their last illnesses, I'm a licensed vet, and I nursed *him*, too, through a spell that should have carried him off. Too bad it didn't."

"What killed the lions?" Malone asked.

"I wish to heaven I knew," Mr. Nemo said. "I only saw them after they were dead."

"What almost killed *him*?" Malone asked.

"His ticker don't tick so good." Mr. Nemo said. "One of these days he's going to flop off, and there won't be any more circus. Would

you like me to read your palm?"

Malone started to say no, changed his mind and started to say yes, finally said, "Sure. If it's for free."

Mr. Nemo grinned, caught Malone's palm, examined it as though it were a radar report.

"You'll live a long time," he reported at last, grinning again. "Do you want to know who killed the cats?"

Malone nodded.

"I think he did it himself. For the insurance. That's just my hunch, Buster, but it's yours, and for free." The plump little man drew a long breath. "Those cats," he said softly. "I saw them dead. I tended them, I nursed them, when they were alive. Maybe I could have saved them, I don't know. I don't even know what killed them." He stood up, stalked to the window of his trailer, paused there a moment, then turned to face Malone. He seemed to have grown six inches taller.

"I liked those cats," he said quietly. Then, not as quietly, "You get out of here. I told you, you're going to live a long time."

Itsy Bitsy was waiting for him outside, her face pale.

"He said I was going to live a long time, so cheer up," Malone told her, "and hand me the gin. Where do we go from here?"

Bitsy said "Here's the gin, and I hope you live long enough to enjoy it. Though I doubt if you will, if you keep that dinner date. She's a man-eating tigress. And now,

you're going to meet a lion tamer." She looked up at Malone, her funny little face turned serious. "Malone. You can do something. You've got to do something. Pops is—" She turned away. "Oh, the hell with it." She led the way into another trailer, this one painted Nile green.

"Eric," she said, "here's our lawyer. He's come to settle Goliath's estate."

The tall, very blonde young man who rose from the bench didn't smile. He said, with a trace of accent, "Miss Bitsy, she likes to make the jokes. This is not a joking matter. Someone is killing the cats."

"How?" Malone said, "And, why? And will you have a drink?" He put the gin bottle on the table, and wished with all his heart that he were back in Chicago, in the warm security of Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar.

"Murder," the young man said, "and why, I don't know. And I will have a drink, and thank you. But if you are putting your heart in this case, you should meet your client." He poured himself a glass of gin, downed it, pushed the bottle back to Malone, and, without another word, strode out through the rear door of the trailer.

"Don't be afraid," Bitsy whispered.

"Me?" Malone whispered back indignantly. He took a long, slow drink of the gin. "Me, I'm not even afraid of flying saucers."

It was then that the door opened,

and Leopold came in. He might not have been the biggest lion in the world, but right then he looked it.

"Scratch him behind the ears," Eric said. "Make friends."

With a terrific effort, Malone restrained himself from saying, "Nice kitty." Leopold rested his head on the little lawyer's knee and sighed. With an even more terrific effort, Malone scratched behind the big lion's ears. To his relief, he heard a distinct purr.

"All my life," Eric said, "I have lived with the cats. Once only was I clawed, and it was not the cat's fault, it was my own. You see —?" He ripped away his shirt.

Malone stared with a cold fascination at the claw marks.

"By me," Eric said, "this scar is a mark of honor. Only a great cat could leave a mark like this. Two years later, she died in my arms. In birth. Goliath was her son."

He began buttoning his shirt and looked at Malone. "You see?" he said. "Now, will you let anyone murder — *him*?"

"Not right now," Malone said. He gave Leopold another tentative and very gentle scratch. "And where is the gin?" He took another look at Eric. The lion tamer was a tall man, with amber eyes like a cat's, and muscles that looked as though they were knitted of piano wire.

"I love my cats," Eric said. He dragged Leopold from Malone's lap, shoved him toward the door,

kicked him gently in the rump, and headed him into his cage. He came back, reached for the gin bottle and said, "You will save his life, yes?"

"I will save his life, maybe," Malone said.

"You do," Eric said, "and I make you a present from myself. A lion cub. A little beauty. You find who kill Goliath, you find who try to kill Leopold, you save Leopold his life, and I give you the Cub. You like to see him now?"

"Tomorrow," the little lawyer said hastily.

Eric buried his head in his hands and said, "I weep. I weep for my cats."

Bitsy nudged Malone and said, "Let's go, Joe."

Outside she said, "Think he killed the cats?" Before he could answer she took his arm and said "Let's go see the Weatherman and the Wildman. But," — again she looked up at him. "Malone, do something. Anything. Those lions —"

"Keep your back hair up," Malone said, "and since Eric kept the gin, let's find ourselves a comfortable bar, and invite the Weatherman and the Wildman in. Maybe one or the other will tell us if it's going to rain."

She giggled, squeezed his arm, and pointed across the street to a sign that read:

RAFFERTY'S BAR AND GRILL
LADIES ALWAYS WELCOME

"I'll meet you there," she told him.

III

Malone fumbled through his pockets, found two greasy, crumpled dollar bills, and a handful of small change. There was also a return trip ticket to Chicago in his wallet, and for a moment he considered using it. Joe the Angel would be good for a ten. There was a five dollar bill stuck away in the "Confidential" drawer. The office rent was paid, his hotel wasn't going to put him out after eighteen years, and a real paying case might come along any minute. He might as well go home.

But, there was Leopold to consider.

He couldn't let Leopold down.

A voice roared "Come in or stay out, *but shut the door!*"

Malone shoved his way through the door, kicked it shut behind him, and slid onto the nearest barstool.

"Gin, beer or whiskey?" Rafferty asked.

"All three," Malone said, "and make it fast."

Rafferty gave him a dirty look. "Oh, a wise guy, huh?"

"No, a thirsty one," Malone told him. He thought things over fast. Rafferty looked like a cross between an oversized gorilla and a tired bloodhound, and he had a voice like an indignant grizzly bear, but the little lawyer decided the

diplomatic thing to do was establish a friendly relationship. "Rafferty, Rafferty," he mused out loud, "I know an Eddie Rafferty in Chicago." He added, "My name's Malone."

"My cousin," Rafferty said. He put down the bottle he'd been pouring from and said, "Are you the Malone who —"

"I'm the Malone who," the lawyer said. "And getting your cousin off on that charge wasn't easy, but," he went on coyly, "It helped that he was innocent."

"I'll be blessed," the bartender said. He extended a huge, hairy paw for a handshake that all but took Malone's arm off, and went back to his pouring. "This one's on the house, Malone. Drink up so I can fill 'em again."

Malone felt again in his pocket. "Oh no, no —"

"Drink up, I said," Rafferty bellowed. "If my cousin Eddie knew you ever paid for a drink in this place —" He paused, "You know, he could have got twenty years."

"Well, thanks," Malone said.

Rafferty leaned across the bar. "Visiting the circus?"

"In a manner of speaking," Malone told him.

"Do you have any idea what's killing them cats?"

"Your guess is as good as mine," Malone said. "And that reminds me. Where's your phone?"

Two minutes later he had his office on the wire. "Maggie? Get

hold of that horse-doctor I defended in that race-track scandal."

"You mean Crawford, the one who still owes half his bill?" Maggie's voice snapped over the wire. "What shall I tell him? And Malone, the bank—"

"Tell him I want him to get here as fast as he can. He can make it in an hour." He gave her the exact location of the little circus. "I want him to perform an autopsy on a dead lion."

There was a little silence. "Malone, do you feel all right?"

"Never felt better in my life," the lawyer lied cheerfully. "And tell him in return we'll forget the rest of that bill."

"Okay, boss. Malone, the bank—"

Malone hung up fast.

"I got a theory about them lions," Rafferty said. "Somebody done it on purpose. And I don't trust that there lion tamer." He began wiping up the bar.

"Why not?" Malone asked, reaching for his glass.

"He don't talk English good," Rafferty said. He sighed. "Hardcastle's show comes here once a year, three weeks. I got to like them lions. They let loose hollering at night. They make me think of my grandfather when he was loaded to the gills." He looked up as the door opened and his face lighted up with a smile like sunrise breaking over the Grand Canyon. "Itsy Bitsy!"

"And friends," the girl said. She smiled impartially at Malone and at Rafferty. "Mr. Malone, Mr. Walker, the Wildman."

Malone looked at the Wildman and decided to go back across the street and crawl in the cage with Leopold.

"Pleastameetcha," the Wildman said. He was swaying just slightly.

"You," Rafferty growled, "take that wig off, and don't come in here with it on, see? Scared half the customers out of the joint last night."

"Good business for the show," the Wildman muttered. "All came to see me this afternoon." He pulled off the offending wig, revealed a head that looked like a peeled egg, and mopped his brow.

"And Mr. Appleboyd, the Weatherman," Bitsy said, looking like a Washington hostess.

The Weatherman gave Malone a wan smile, extended a limp hand, and said, "A pleasure." He was a small man in a neat grey suit, who could easily have been mistaken for a bank president.

"And what do you do?" Malone asked, fascinated.

"I predict," the Weatherman said. "I don't know how I do it. It's a gift."

"Give it back," Rafferty said.

"He's got his own racket," Bitsy said. "All the farmers within walking distance come to consult him, for a price, as to will it, or won't it, rain."

"You underestimate me, my dear," the Weatherman said. "I split with the show and predict for nothing for them." He sighed deeply, looked at his watch and said, "At twenty minutes after ten tomorrow morning, it is going to rain." For a minute it looked as though he might burst into tears.

Malone had a strange feeling that he'd been dropped by rocket ship into another world.

"For you," Bitsy said. She handed Malone a slightly soiled envelope which had *Hardcastle Productions* printed in the corner. "Pops came to. He sent you this. Said it was your retainer. The rest, later."

Malone looked in the envelope. It contained five ten dollar bills that looked as though they'd lived a long, hard life. This time, it was he who sighed. This was going to be one of the cases he would end up handling for less than free.

But at least he had fifty more dollars than he'd had thirty seconds ago. He slid a ten dollar bill over the bar and suggested a drink.

The Wildman and the Weatherman consented happily. Rafferty filled the glasses, shoved the bill back and said "No friend of a friend of Rafferty's is going to buy a drink at this bar, as long as the friend of Rafferty's is present. Malone, what do you think happened to them lions?"

"I know," the Wildman said. He downed his gin, hiccuped politely, and said, "Nemo's been killing

'em. He's sore at Pops. He's a Doc. He'd know how, and he'd know how to cover up, account of he's the only Doc around."

Rafferty looked at Malone and said "Somebody's following the show, maybe. Or, it's gotta be someone with the circus."

The Weatherman said wearily, "There's a rival show on this circuit. Could be, the owner is bribing someone to kill the Hardcastle cats. Someone like him, for instance." He nodded toward the Wildman.

In the disturbance that followed, Malone was aware only of Rafferty moving fast. When he opened his eyes, the Wildman was at one end of the bar, and the Weatherman at the other.

"Now you stay there, and *you* stay *there*," Rafferty roared, "or I'll throw you both out."

"Happens all the time, but they're the best of friends," Itsy Bitsy said. "Shall we move on, Malone?" Outside in the warm July sunshine, she asked, "How are you doing for suspects?"

"So far, none," Malone said. In the distance he heard Leopold roar.

"The Wildman," she said, "he's out. He has a deathly fear of the cats — he won't even go near the cages. It's about the only thing he is afraid of, and besides, he's strictly honest, except that he's a phony. The Weatherman —"

"Quiet," Malone said, "I'm thinking." He stood still for a moment. "Were those lions insured?"

"Not for much." Now she stood still, stared at Malone, and suddenly slapped him. "Why, you don't think Pops—"

"No," the little lawyer told her, "but someone else might." He patted her on the shoulder. "Now show me this trailer next to the lion's cage, where I can sit down and catch up on my thinking. And, I'm expecting a visitor."

He smiled at her, curled up on the trailer couch, and was asleep by the time she'd stepped out the door.

IV

A pounding on the door woke him abruptly an hour later. Doc Crawford, a big, flabby man with dewlap eyes, looked at him sourly. "I've got everything I need out in the car, Malone, and I hope this isn't a gag."

Malone said "I wish it were."

He led the way to the tarpaulin-covered body of Goliath. "Get going," he said hoarsely, averting his eyes. "I'll be in the trailer."

Doc Crawford whistled softly and said, "Big one, wasn't he!"

Malone slammed the door of the trailer behind him. From nearby, very nearby, he could hear a long, low grumble from Leopold.

"Don't worry," the little lawyer murmured to the big lion, and hoped that he was right. He closed his eyes.

Pops Hardcastle could have killed the lions, for the insurance. But it would certainly cost more to replace

a lion than the insurance would cover. Nemo would have the know-how and the opportunity to cover up, and he had an admitted grudge against Pops. The "Death Defying Amazon" from the motordrome probably wouldn't turn a hair at murdering a lion, but why?

The Wildman? The Weatherman could be right. If there was a rival show involved, and the Wildman could be bribed — but according to Itsy Bitsy, he was afraid of the cats. Not that that couldn't be faked. But would it be worth it to a rival show?

How about the Weatherman? Maybe Leopold had taken up weather predicting as a side line.

Eric Malone scowled and thought about the scars he had been shown. But the lion tamer's grief had been genuine.

Maybe Itsy Bitsy herself had gone slightly off the beam.

The little lawyer rolled over on the couch, closed his eyes, and said to himself, "Probably Rocky Mountain spotted fever, and I'm going back to Chicago and send Pops Hardcastle his fifty bucks back." How?

He didn't know.

"Leopold," he reminded himself firmly, "is your client. And you've never let a client down yet."

The minutes passed a century at a time, while he waited for Doc Crawford. The sound of steps coming into the trailer was the most welcome sound he had ever heard.

"Well, the lion is as dead as Christopher Columbus," Doc Crawford said. He shoved back his jacket, threw his hat on the floor and mopped his brow with a dirty handkerchief. He blew his nose loudly. "I like cats. Had a tomcat once, lived to be seventeen years old. Died of old age. That lion was murdered."

"Yes," Malone demanded, "but how?"

"Any fool could see," Doc Crawford said. "And that magician calls himself a vet!" He blew his nose again. "Doped, first. Then something — could have been a big knitting needle — stuck in behind the ear. Mark wouldn't show."

"I'll be double-damned," the little lawyer murmured. He scowled. "How would you go about slipping a lion a mickey?"

"Simplest thing in the world. Mix your dope with hamburger, toss it in his cage." Now he scowled in his turn. "But why go to all that trouble with the knife, or the knitting needle, or whatever it was? Why not just poison the lion and get it over with?"

"Why not?" Malone said. He chewed savagely on his cigar. "And two more questions I'd like to send to an information bureau. Who, and why?" He threw the cigar away and reached for two fresh ones. He handed one to Doc, lit his own, and said, "Why would anyone want to murder a lion?"

"Malone," Doc said, "your guess

is probably better than mine. And thanks for the cigar. In return for it, I'll tell you something. This Nemo, he's not only a no-good vet, and probably a no-good magician, but I think he's a crook."

"I hope he's not a no-good fortune teller," Malone muttered, remembering Nemo's last prediction. "Never mind. Why?"

"Malone, I'd just finished with the lion, when old man Hardcastle — the guy you're working for — came by to see how I was doing. I told him what I told you, and he grabs for his heart, and he's dying. I got him back to his trailer — this is what took me so long, Malone —"

"Time and a half for overtime," Malone said. "Go on."

"He tells me all about his heart. Malone, I wasn't always a horse doctor, you know that. This Nemo —" Doc Crawford took time out to spit "— every time the old man is dying, he takes tablets. This Nemo gets 'em for him. The old man believes the tablets are all that keep him alive. I went over him like I was the Mayo brothers. I looked at the tablets. That's what took me so long, Malone."

"You said that before," Malone said wearily. He heard a faint sound outside the trailer door, decided to do nothing about it.

"He doesn't have any more heart trouble than you have fleas," Doc Crawford said. "Maybe less. And the tablets are just plain soda mints. Dime a box at any drugstore."

A blonde blaze of fury shot into the trailer. "You!" Itsy said. "Are you telling the truth?"

"My dear girl," Doc said, "The old man has a type of just plain indigestion that acts, feels, and sometimes even sounds like a heart condition. In addition, he's an artistic, excitable type who is subject to faints. A little rest, and a soda mint, and he's well again. Outside of that, he's strong as an ox, and he'll probably outlive the three of us. Just watch his diet and — *wait* —"

By the time he said the last word, Itsy was not only out of the trailer, but a good hundred yards away from it. As she'd gone through the door, Malone thought he'd heard her say something reflecting seriously on the legality of someone's parentage.

"Impulsive type," Doc said. "Does Nemo make a lot of take-home pay with this outfit?"

Malone shook his head slowly. "I doubt it. And there are other outfits. He must have some good reason for making sure Pops Hardcastle keeps him on."

Suddenly he remembered. "And for that matter, so have I." He reached for his wallet, pulled out one of the remaining ten dollar bills, and said "Why don't you have a drink and dinner on me, over at Rafferty's? Tell him you're a friend of mine. And stay and watch the show."

He smiled wryly. "We may need another autopsy. You never can tell about lions."

V

A few minutes later he strolled down the improvised street. Next door to the trailer that had been provided for him he paused at the lions' tent, smiled at Eric, waved at Leopold, and went on fast before he could be shown the lion cub that was to be his present. It was the wrong time of day for the crowds, but the big cats were obligingly, though wearily, roaring for the customers who did stray into the tent.

In the booths, things were as usual. Hot dogs, cotton candy, soft drinks, three baseballs for a dime. The Wildman was busy being wild, but not too busy to manage a wink at Malone from under his uncombed black mane. The Weatherman was busy telling a customer that there would be rain at twenty minutes after ten in the morning; without interrupting himself he raised one hand to Malone in a universal signal that meant "Thanks for the drink." There was a slight mouse under his eye. The Fat Lady was busy selling postcards. The Thin Man was busy selling postcards. The magician was probably telling somebody's fortune. And in the distance, there was the roar of the motordrome. Malone's steps quickened along with his heart.

He climbed the steps and looked down into the bowl. The frail figure in white, whirling, whirling, whirling. She seemed so frail, so delicate.

The motorcycle was horizontal now, in a last burst of noisy speed. It slowed slowly, slackened to a stop, and the rider leaped off, to wave at the applauding crowd. He watched breathlessly while she whipped off her cap and goggles, shook out her lovely, silver-blond hair, bowed, and ran gracefully to the exit.

An attendant wheeled away the motorcycle, a barker stepped out to announce the time of the next show, and that was all.

Malone ran down the stairs to meet her and beat her to the door by divided seconds. There was sweat on her face, dust, a slight smudge of oil. She was beautiful.

"We had a date," Malone said, when he was able to speak. "Remember?"

She nodded. She linked her arm through his. "Come along with me while I change. I do like to wear a skirt once in a while, even if it would take us too long to get to the College Inn and back."

The trailer was small, but compact and comfortable. She ushered Malone into the one easy chair, pointed to the ice-box, said, "Please help yourself," and vanished between a pair of curtains.

"If you have a strapless evening gown, wear it," Malone called to her, settling down in the chair with a bottle of beer by his side. "College Inn or no College Inn."

She came back through the door, a white robe clutched around her. The eyes, like the inside of a rifle

barrel, were shooting now, shooting flame. "What made you say that?"

Malone stared at her, bewildered. "Because you're a beautiful woman. Because I like to see beautiful women look beautiful."

The flames slowly died down. A smile drifted over her face. "If I had a strapless evening gown," she said softly, "I would wear it for you." She went back of the curtains.

The little lawyer sighed. There was a faint crack between the curtains. It drew his eyes like a magnet. For just a moment, as she changed blouses, he caught a glimpse of her arms and back.

They were criss-crossed with scars.

Malone cursed himself for being a clumsy fool with his remark about the evening gown. Of course, there were hazards in the life of a speed demon motor-drome rider!

When she came back she still wore white; long-sleeved white blouse, white skirt. He looked at her and said, "Seeing you — is the sort of thing that makes men try to beat the stock market." He sniffed. "And that perfume — Would make men try to conquer the world."

She laughed lightly. "You like it?" She reached into the tiny dressing room for an atomizer, shot it at Malone's coat lapel. "A memento."

A memento, Malone reflected, that was going to be hard to explain when he got back to the office, if he ever got back. It was a rich, heady odor, oranges, and mimosa and Heaven knew what.

"I have it made for me special," she whispered. "Later — after the show —" She smiled at him. "Shall we go to dinner?"

Then they heard the scream. A woman's scream.

There was a rumble of excitement and the sound of running feet, but Malone managed to outrun everyone to the source of the scream. He slammed the door of Nemo's trailer behind him, locked it and managed to catch his breath.

The magician was on the floor, face down. There was a little blood on the floor, not much.

Malone looked at Itsy Bitsy and said, "I know how you feel, but you shouldn't have taken the law into your own hands."

"I didn't touch him," she whispered hoarsely. "I went to see Pops. I told him what your — horse doctor — had said. Pops had been lying down, he got up and went out. I waited for him. When he didn't come back, I ran down here, and I found —" She pointed to the floor. "I shouldn't have screamed."

"Well, you did," the little lawyer said grimly. "Where's Pops now?"

She shook her head helplessly.

"Until we find him," Malone said, "We've got to do something with this body —"

"What body?" came a voice from the floor. Nemo rolled over, sat up, and demanded "Who hit me, and with what?" His face was pale, and blood was still dripping from his cut lip.

Malone hoisted him to his feet, shoved him on the bed, laid a handkerchief over his mouth, and said, "Don't talk." An insistent pounding had begun on the door. He glared at Itsy and said, "Don't you talk, either."

He opened the door and said, "Come on in, folks. No charge. Mr. Nemo here had a tooth pulled. The little lady here came in to put a cold compress on his face, and she thought she saw a mouse."

The white-faced Nemo and Itsy Bitsy nodded furious assent.

At the door, the speed demon said, "I never thought *you'd* be afraid of *mice!*"

Itsy Bitsy said coldly, "I may be afraid of mice, but I'm not afraid of rats. Including female ones." She almost knocked down half the crowd on her way out.

"Show's over, folks," Malone said. "Go home." He closed the door and looked at the stricken magician. "Better put some iodine on that lip. Who hit you, and why?"

"I don't know."

Malone sighed deeply. "I never call a fellow man a liar except in court. But whoever hit you was in front of you."

"I had my eyes closed."

The little lawyer sighed again. "All right. But answer this one. Why are you so anxious to stay with this show that you'd fool old Pops Hardcastle about his heart condition?"

"I have my reasons."

"Well," Malone said, "I'll have to find it out the hard way. But don't forget you've had a tooth pulled. Or I'll come in and pull all of them. And don't forget the iodine."

VI

Outside, life had settled down almost to normal. Malone walked briskly up the street to the red and green striped trailer and marched in without knocking. Itsy Bitsy was bathing Pops' hand.

"Next time," Malone said, "hit him once for me. How do you feel?"

"Outside of a little indigestion," Pops said, "I feel fine." He flexed his muscles. "Think I'll go back and hit him again."

"Now Pops," Itsy said, "you've got plenty of time."

Pops subsided. "Next time, I'll —" he paused. "Why did he do it? Why did he try to scare a helpless old man to death?"

"If you're a helpless old man," Malone said, "I'm the Statue of Liberty. And since you've got a heart like an ox, try a cigar. He could have made a mistake, you know."

Pops said three words, and Itsy slapped him gently.

"Or," Malone said, "he was so anxious to stay on with the circus that he'd use any means to do it. But, why?"

"Got me there," Pops said.

"Does he make much money? Does he have a private racket of

some kind? Does he have a girl friend?"

"No to the first one," Pops said. "Don't think so, to the second two. Ouch, Itsy, that hurt. Mr. Malone, did he kill the cats?"

"He could have," Malone said. "So could any number of people. How much do you know about them?"

The old man shook his head. "Outside of Itsy and me, not much. Itsy, I raised from a pup. The rest — this ain't a big time circus. People here, they come and they go." He pulled out a big silver watch. "Almost show time. The hours have flown."

And so, Malone reflected, has a very promising dinner date.

"Well," Pops said, "you can stay up and watch the lions tonight. Fixed it so you can sleep in their tent. Only, don't *sleep*. See you at the show, and keep your eye on the lions. Rest of the show isn't much good anyway."

Malone wandered around the grounds, looking for his lost date. Her next performance would be after the main event, and she had to be somewhere. He gave up at last and went across to Rafferty's, where he found Doc Crawford and the big bartender engaged in a furious discussion of race horses. It reminded the lawyer too much of a recent, unfortunate and highly unprofitable experience and he sat morosely at the end of the bar, nursing a rye and beer. The discussion was at its

height when he decided to go back to the circus.

The show was on. Malone watched for a while. The best that could be said for the performers was that everyone was trying. Even Pops, in slightly shabby but newly pressed ringmaster's garb, failed to hold his attention. He walked around to the back of the tent and watched while the lions were being carted from their cages to be released into the big cage for the animal act. As he stepped closer, he could have sworn that Leopold recognized him and was passing an introduction along to his pals.

Suddenly, just as the transfer began, the trouble started. Leopold gave a low growl, then an angry roar that was picked up all down the line. Malone stood frozen. He saw Eric moving fast. In the next instant Leopold had broken loose and was headed straight for Malone, maddened fury in his eyes.

Someone yelled, "On your face! Don't move!"

Malone obeyed, and in a hurry, his eyes shut against the soft dust. He heard sounds that had no meaning for him, movement, voices, and at last Pops introducing the animal act from inside the tent, and a gruff voice saying, "Okay, Buster, you can get up now."

Malone dusted himself off, went to the tent flap, looked, and gasped. There were two people in the cage with the big cats, and one of them was Itsy Bitsy. Even to his unprac-

ticed eye, it could be seen that she knew almost as much about the business as Eric himself. He saw too that the lions were upset and nervous, hard to control. Did they know about the murders? He wondered. They had been witnesses. If there were only a way to ask them!

He was pacing up and down in front of the main tent when Eric appeared, still in costume and with his handsome young face shiny with sweat. He swung at Malone. Malone, a graduate of the west-of-the-yards school of fighting, ducked and said, "There's been enough of that!"

Eric called him a series of names in a number of languages. "You are trying to break up my act. You frightened my cats."

"I frightened *them!*" Malone said.

"They were not angry," Eric said, "they were afraid." He calmed down a little. "I apologize for myself. You did not mean to frighten them. But I love my cats." He sniffed at Malone's lapel.

Malone felt himself blushing. "I don't ordinarily use perfume," he said. "And what we need is a drink."

VII

He left the animal trainer's trailer fifteen minutes later with a short gin under his belt and the knowledge that the young man had high hopes of matrimony with Itsy Bitsy. The "street" was coming to life now, with the show over. Barkers were calling their spiels, and in the distance he could hear the motor-

drome, like an infuriated lion. He shuddered.

"I don't blame you," Bitsy's voice said. She grinned at him as he wheeled around. "You almost were chewed up into little bits tonight."

"Didn't worry me," Malone lied. He bowed over her hand. "You were magnificent!"

She blushed a little and said, "Well, thanks. I had good training."

"And I hope you're happy with that nice young man. Care to join me in a beer?"

"Later," she told him. "Got to go help Pops count tickets. And he *is* nice, Malone. Even if he did chase around for a while with — that woman." She looked toward the motordrome. "But so did Nemo. I still think he followed her to the circus. And even Pops — what has she got, Malone?"

"Perfume," he told her solemnly, "and you don't need it." He headed across the street, singing under his breath. Suddenly he stopped, thought for a moment, and then covered the rest of the distance in what was close to a dead run.

He slid onto the stool next to Doc Crawford, waved at Rafferty and said "Give my friend, the eminent physician, two of what he's been drinking, give me my usual, and add one of anything you want." He grabbed the veterinary's arm. "Tell me. What gives a lion fits?"

"Could be worms," Doc said. "Now you take this in the fifth at Jamaica —"

"You listen to me," Malone said hoarsely, "or I'll drink your drink myself." He quickly explained what had happened behind the tent. "What frightened the lions?"

Doc Crawford grabbed his drink before Malone could take it away and said, "As I was telling my friend here, cats have a kind of —" he paused to blow his nose — "second sight. Like this tomcat I was telling you about. He could predict a winner before I could. Put a Racing Form down on the floor —"

"Too bad he didn't live," Malone said. "You'd probably own half the real estate in Gary. Answer my question."

"All cats can smell if a person is afraid of them," Doc Crawford said. "All cats can smell if a person is going to hurt them. Cat gets scared, he attacks. There's your little fits. Talk about an elephant never forgets. Huh!" He reached for the other drink.

"Attended a sick kitten once," he went on. "Had to give it nasty medicine. Every time I went near, kitten scratched me. Sent in my nurse. He scratched *her!*"

"Why?" Rafferty demanded, fascinated.

"I'd been kissing my nurse," Doc said, holding out his empty glass. "Three years later I saw her again. The kitten, I mean. Gave me a dirty look and scratched me again. Does that answer your question, Malone?" He hiccuped.

"It does," Malone said. He laid a

bill on the bar and said, "Rafferty, anything he wants, but keep him here."

Rafferty started to push the bill away. "Any friend of mine —"

But Malone was halfway through the door. As it closed he heard Doc Crawford saying, "Now this tomcat who picked the three longshots at —"

VIII

The grounds were fairly quiet now. Malone made his way to the animal tent, slipping in quietly. A cot had been made up for him in the shadows and he looked at it with longing. It had been a long day and a longer night. No, Leopold was his client. He looked over the lions and was greeted with rumbles from every cage but one.

Leopold was asleep. He was *too* asleep. Malone listened to him breathe, crossed his fingers, reached in through the bars and pulled Leopold's whiskers. Leopold didn't move. The other lions set up a clamor that could have been heard in Skagway, Alaska.

Malone ducked through the door fast and headed for Nemo's trailer. He knocked loud, and walked in.

"Do you have any strong anti-septic?" he called. "I cut myself shaving."

Nemo got up from the couch where he had been sitting. "You don't fool me for a minute, Malone." His lip was still red and swollen, his little round eyes were red

from what might have been tears. "Strip to the skin and get under the shower. I've something that will take the smell off you, and you're small enough to wear a suit of mine. I know what you're doing, and I'm going to help. I'm going to talk."

The hot water and soap almost made Malone forget he'd had no dinner and less sleep. Nemo came to the door of the trailer's shower stall, handed in a bottle, and said, "Pour this over you, Mr. Malone. I'll get out the suit."

The bottle's contents stunk, but at least they didn't stink of mimosa.

"I'm here with the circus because I loved her," Nemo called through the door. "I pulled that act with Pops so he'd keep me on. I didn't kill the cats. Anything else you want to ask?"

"Yes," Malone said, struggling into Nemo's pants. "Do you have a pair of suspenders?"

It was very dark and very quiet in the lion's tent. Someone, Malone reflected, might turn on a light and recognize Nemo's suit, and there could be someone who didn't like Nemo. Again he looked longingly at the cot. He stuffed it with hay, arranged the covers, and crawled into the empty cage that had once been Goliath's. In another cage, Leopold snored.

Sometime long after midnight he heard the footsteps, almost inaudible, soft as a kitten's paw. He slid up from the straw as silently as he

could. His eyes, now accustomed to the darkness, could see the figure pause by the cot, look at what was a convincingly sleeping figure, nod approval and move on toward Leopold's cage. He prepared to move. Cautiously he shifted his body.

All hell broke loose then, and broke fast. Every lion in the tent gave tongue. Instinctively, Malone ducked.

A moment later the lights were on, and everyone was there. The Wildman, the Weatherman, the Fat Lady, Pops, Itsy Bitsy, Eric, Doc Crawford, and even Rafferty. Everyone was making a noise except Leopold and a slim, white-clad figure on the ground.

Then suddenly everyone was silent. They stared at the twisted, inert body.

Malone brushed a little straw off his lapel and said "Don't worry, I'll defend you." He might have said it to anyone in the group. But there was no definite reaction.

No one moved. Not even one of the lions. Malone walked softly over to the dare-devil's body, looked at it closely, and said, "Her own weapon." He pointed to the handle of a thin-bladed knife.

"She killed the cats," Pops said unbelievably.

Malone nodded. "When the police examine her — and we'll call them soon — they'll find her body is covered with scars. Scars that had a special meaning."

"She was clawed by a cat," Nemo cried out. "She almost died. It ruined her career, her life. When she recovered — she was afraid of them and she hated them. Her hate turned into courage and her courage into — the motordrome. Daredevil!"

There was a strangled sob in his throat. "I knew she was a little mad. I knew what she was doing, and I covered up for her. And finally, I had to —" He swallowed noisily.

"Nemo," Malone said, "I like you and all that, but as a vet you're no good, as a magician you're no good, and as a liar, you're even worse. You didn't kill your wife any more than I killed Julius Caesar. Am I right?"

"Wife?"

"She was, wasn't she?"

"Yes."

"A shot in the dark," Malone said, "and it hit." He looked around. "Any other confessions? We all seem to be in a confessing mood."

"I kill her," Eric said. He stepped up, one arm around Bitsy's waist. "Because she kill my cats, my lovely cats."

"Anyone else here want to confess?" Malone asked. "And to what?"

Pops grabbed at Malone's arm. "She'd been killing the cats. Can you blame me if —"

"Shut up," Malone said. He unwrapped a cigar very slowly. "I've never seen a more unconvincing

batch of liars in my life. For good reasons, I'll grant that. But to confess to murder — in the presence of the real murderer —”

Leopold woke and growled sleepily about what he thought of people who disturbed his sleep.

“You're right,” Doc Crawford said. “It must have happened that way. See that lion's paw? See where that knife went into the babe's heart? She had it in her hand, ready to kill him. He rolled over in a

drugged sleep and shoved the knife into her.”

No one said anything for a moment.

“You mean, Leopold —” Pops said.

“A simple act of justice,” Malone said. He reached through the bars of the cage and patted Leopold gently on the nose.

“Remember I told you, Leopold,” he said softly, “I never lost a client yet.”



Doris remembered the warning the moment she heard footsteps: a woman had recently been attacked on that very same dark street.

Assault

A Short Short

BY GRANT COLBY



DORIS TAYLOR pulled the cowl of her raincoat over her short auburn curls, tightened the belt about her small waist, and tried to smile at her sister Barbara.

"Well," she said, "I guess I'd better be going." She hated to leave the warmth and friendship of the Lacey's living room, but if she didn't get home before George did there would be another scene.

"You sure you don't want me to walk you to the bus stop?" Bill Lacey asked.

Doris shook her head. "It's only half a block. And besides, it's still raining."

Her sister followed her out onto the porch. "Wait here until you see the bus coming," she said.

Doris looked up the dark suburban street toward the direction from which the bus would come. "All right. But you'd better put something on, Barbara. It's too wet to . . ."

"I don't mind," Barbara said. She closed the door behind them. "Doris . . . about George. Is there something you haven't told me? I mean, something you didn't want to say in front of Bill?"

"No. Only what I said. George . . . well, he just sits around the house brooding, and then he gets up and goes out. Maybe two or three times a week."

"Like tonight?"

"Yes. Like tonight." She took a deep breath. "It . . . it's driving me crazy."

"You still love the guy? Sister to sister now; I want the truth."

"Of course I love him! Do you think I'd put up with something like that if I didn't?"

"You might. You haven't been married long enough to . . ."

"It isn't any other girl, Barbara. I know that. It's just — me."

Barbara stared out at the rain-blackened asphalt of the street. "I

just happened to think of something. I'm going to get Bill, and we're going to walk down to the bus stop with you."

"Please don't. It isn't necessary."

"I don't want to worry you, honey," Barbara said, "but . . ."

"There's the bus now," Doris said. "Well, 'bye, darling." She started down the steps. "I'll call you tomorrow."

"Doris! Wait!"

"Say good night to Bill for me," Doris called over her shoulder. She ran as fast as her four-inch heels would let her, down to the sidewalk, and then along the sidewalk toward the bus stop.

The bus' headlights bathed her, and then, almost before she knew it, the bus was abreast of her. She cried out, but the driver was not looking at her. A young girl was standing by him, and the driver was dividing his attention between the girl and the road.

Doris caught her breath and watched the twin red tail lights disappear in the pall of rain. The bus stop was in front of a vacant lot, crowded with trees and bushes, and she stepped back off the sidewalk so that the overhanging branches deflected most of the rain. There would be another bus in ten minutes, she knew.

She glanced down at the raincoat she had bought just that afternoon. She'd seen it in a store window, knew that George would like it on her — and so she'd bought it.

She bit her lip and blinked back the tears. It seemed that everything she saw or heard, even everything she thought about, was in some way associated with her husband. Somehow she had failed him. If he would only tell her what was wrong . . .

She looked enviously in the direction of Bill and Barbara's house, hidden now by walls of shrubbery. Bill wasn't nearly so handsome as George . . . but Bill never left Barbara by herself. He loved Barbara.

Suddenly she remembered what her sister had said, back there on the porch — about having just thought of something. There had been a note of concern in her voice. No — not concern. Anxiety.

But anxiety about what?

It came to her then, quite suddenly. A neighbor's daughter had been attacked somewhere near here. Attacked and killed.

She shuddered; the dark street seemed even darker now, the cold rain even more chill against her face. She drew the cowed raincoat more tightly about her, and, once again, glanced back in the direction of the house. Maybe . . .

A hand closed over her mouth, a man's hard arm whipped around her body and pinned her own arms to her sides.

She tried to scream, but the big hand choked the breath back into her throat. She bit until she tasted the salty flow of blood, and kicked back at him with her spike heels.

But it was useless. She felt herself lifted bodily and dragged far back into the utter blackness of the trees.

An eternity went by. She could see nothing; she could only lie there, crushed against the wet, rock-strewn ground, struggling in helpless terror.

And then it was over, and the crushing weight left her. From somewhere across the city, thunder rolled, and, nearer to her, she could hear the ragged sound of the man's breathing.

Suddenly lightning rent the sky, the scene was as bright as if illuminated by arc light, and she looked

straight into the face of her attacker.

His face was not handsome now. It was twisted, bestial. The lips were stretched and distorted.

And, in that brief instant of lightning glare, the face came apart.

"Doris!" he mumbled. "My God! *Doris!*"

Then the lightning was gone; the blackness was there again.

The blackness . . . and the paralyzing horror of her knowledge.

She could not speak, could not move. She could only lie there and listen to her husband's body crashing through the undergrowth toward the street.



MUGGED AND PRINTED

JAMES M. CAIN (*Cigarette Girl*) is perhaps best known for his



The Postman Always Rings Twice, in which Lana Turner and the late John Garfield acted. Through *Postman*, *Double Indemnity*, *Serenade*, and *Mildred Pierce*, his name has become synonymous with fast-paced entertainment and intricate plotting. Cain was born in 1892 in

Annapolis, Md. and attended Washington College. Until 1931 he was a reporter and editorial writer. Since 1931, he's devoted his time exclusively to novels and movie work — with occasional breather for exciting short stories.

STEVE FRAZEE (*Graveyard Shift*) is a native Coloradoan with a lust for the outdoors, a completely uninhibited sense of humor, and a most talented typewriter. Winner of the \$2,000 first-prize in a recent national mystery story contest, his varied published writings include a fine adventure novel, *Shining Mountains*, and a large crop of first-rate



magazine stories. Frazee's background includes road construction, tunnel contracts, mining, newspaper work, publicity work, teaching, a year in vaudeville, and service in the last war.

CRAIG RICE'S ancestry lists Scotch, Irish, Osage Indian and Polynesian blood. From this impossible mixture, and from years of police reporter experience, her fertile imagination continues to turn out a steady stream of novels, short stories, and fact material, of which her recent *45 Murderers* is the latest glittering example. *Don't Go Near*, in this



issue, features John J. Malone, the Chicago lawyer with gin in his blood, rather than Scotch. Miss Rice and Mr. Malone have been together through many a very tight situation.

WILLIAM P. MCGIVERN (*Old Willie*) has had countless serials in *The Saturday Evening Post*, and numbers some three hundred published short stories to his credit. His first novel, *But Death Runs Faster* was a Dodd Mead Red Badge prize winner, and he's been turning them out with consistently excellent regularity since. Now living in New York, he is the father of two children. He also shares a typewriter with his wife since she is Maureen Dailey, an author in her own right. That kind of sharing works too!



Since we ran the X-Ray photo of JOHN ROSS MACDONALD, we've received dozens of letters asking us to let the readers in on the secret of his identity. In this matter, we resemble the taciturn clam. All we can say is, he writes Lew Archer, and that *The Guilty Ones* is on p. 1. ♦ EVAN HUNTER, on the other hand, saw the photo and wrote us: "That is not Macdonald. It is my Uncle Charlie, and I would recognize him anywhere." Hunter wrote his new Matt Cordell novelette (*Now Die In It*) at his Hicksville, Long Island home, where his wife and three sons okayed it before submission. His new Popular Library novel, *Don't Crowd Me*, is now on the stands. ♦ Jonathan Craig (*Services Rendered*) insists that all any writer needs is an understanding wife, a typewriter that works, and an agent that does the same. A recent arrival in New York, his past includes stints as jazz trombonist, bartender, carnival man, and sailor. ♦ Robert Patrick Wilmot (*Stakeout*) tells us he's seen every skid row from here to Borneo and back — and that he's come across every type of character in most of them. This and his skilled writing accounts for the realism in his yarns.

IN THIS ISSUE:

MAYHEM

JAMES M. CAIN, author of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and *Double Indemnity*, utilizes a song of death and an arrangement of sinister chords in his *Cigarette Girl*. ROBERT PATRICK WILMOT is on tap with a little man and a big job in a yarn titled *Stakeout*.

MISCHIEF

CRAIG RICE is here with a new *John J. Malone* novelette which takes the Chicago lawyer to a circus midway covered with blood. And MICHAEL FESSIER has come up with a tale about pranksters and a half-wit named *Marty*.

MURDER

JOHN ROSS MACDONALD is back with a *Lew Archer* novelette that sends the private eye on a hunt for the missing mistress of a girl's school. And EVAN HUNTER brings us *Matt Cordell* again in a novelette about the murder of a young girl and her unborn child. HAROLD Q. MASUR's *Build Another Coffin* mixes a sick woman, a will, and a box of chocolates with homicide!

MALICE

STEVE FRAZEE, the \$2,000 first-prize winner in a recent major mystery story contest, is here with *Graveyard Shift*, an intricate tale of suspenseful detection. And there's WILLIAM MCGIVERN with a thriller titled *Old Willie*, and JONATHAN CRAIG with a story as piercing as the wail of a police siren.

MORE

New features include *Crime Carnival* — *Manhunt's Movie of the Month* — and the first in a series of special non-fiction pieces by DAN SONTUP: *Portrait Of A Killer*. All in all, a solidly packed issue — for pure reading enjoyment!