MANHUNT

WORLD'S MOST POPULAR CRIME-FICTION MAGAZINE

OCTOBER, 1963

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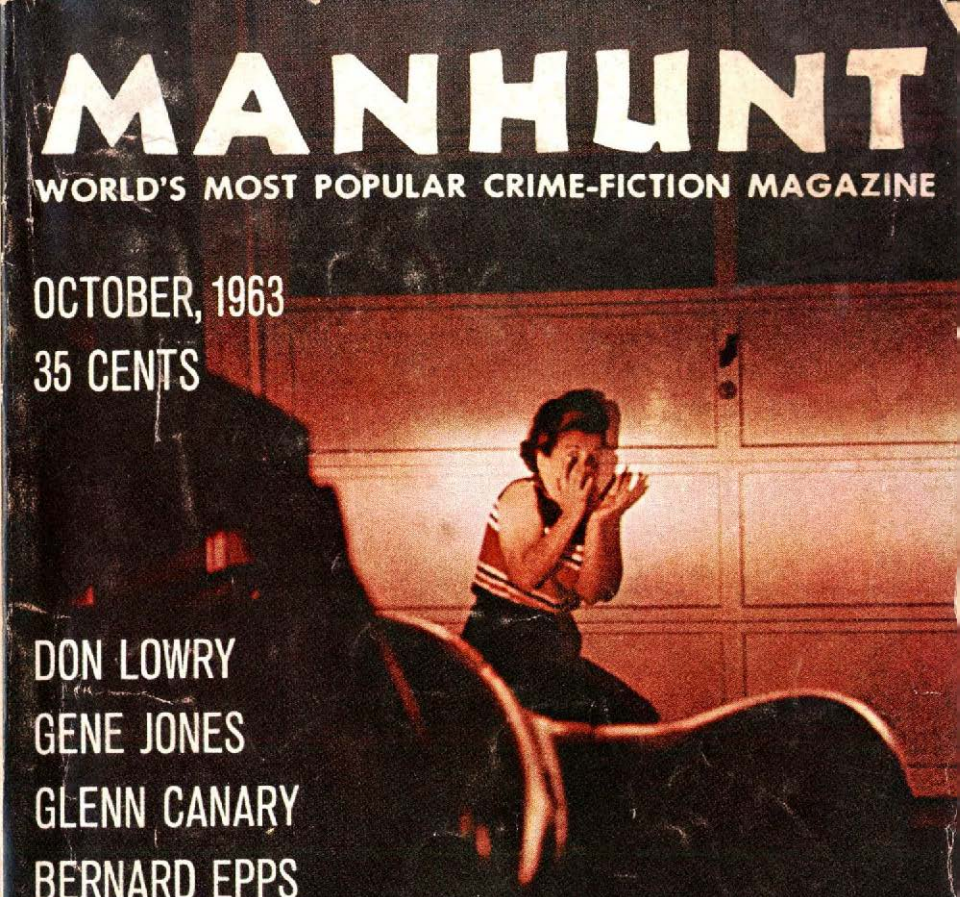

DON LOWRY
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ROSWELL ROHDE
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STEPHEN MARLOWE
ROBERT EDMOND ALTER

EVERY STORY NEW

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SHORT STORIES

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"THE DUCHESS"

It made a good tabloid headline. Great for page four. It had sex-appeal.

BY CHARLES MIRON

HER LONG silky legs kicked high. The tired trumpet behind her coughed up an unconcerned note. The drummer's foot pedaled an obvious beat. The crowd began to stamp their feet in deadly unison.

"Take 'em off!"

She turned her full ripe body slowly. The shouts came from quick throats. She tried not to hear them.

"C'mon, Duchess . . . ACTION!"

She twisted her lush body full cycle . . . and faced them. Her hips began a taunting weave. The awakened crowd hushed. She slid the first veil free from her body.

"Faster . . . FASTER!"

She tried to keep in step to the beat. The second veil rustled free from her midriff. The bald head front center clutched wildly for the floating flimsy stretch of silk. His stubby fingers bloated with a fat ruby clawed the soft threads.

"How's 'bout the one 'round your boobs, Duchess?"

The harsh, naked laughter stuck to her soft skin like a pin prick. A shrill whistle cut through the smoke drenched room. The fierce unwavering spotlight forced tight drops of sweat from her. She tried desperately to smile.

"Bombs away, baby!"

The thin draping wound about her hard breasts began to slowly unravel. She spun lightly to let the warm silk inch free. A dead silence filled the room. The smooth shimmer of snow white skin burst free, as the wispy veil tickled the still air and floated to the scarred floor. The pink tipped nipples rose hard. Heavy breathing came from all parts of the room.

The moon faced black trumpeter tried a high note. Cheap booze had cut his wind too thin. The pig faced drummer stumbled over a tricky bridge.

A sweaty, hairy hand grazed her high tight buttocks as she moved about the close floor. She tried to still the nausea that boiled inside her flat stomach. The catcalls ripped at her.

"Shake it . . . but don't break it!"

The sixth veil slipped free. The last veil stuck to her sweating, shimmering lower middle. A shadowed blue gelatin spotlighted her heaving breasts. The blue mood gripped a new excitement within the tired room. Her graceful arms moved silently through the crust of hanging smoke. Her slim fingers held tightly to the last veil. She remembered a boy named George. She had long forgotten his face. He had thrown himself upon her. Her screams had echoed back to her for a long time.

"You make me feel SO young!"

The sing song voice carried from the rear and pressed hard against her delicate ears. She tried to force the stain of burnt tobacco from her nostrils. The last veil stuck tighter. The high black mesh stockings clung to her shapely legs. The oversize pink garter centered by the fake rhinestone, bit sharply into her muscled thighs. A dull ache filled her tired body. The black trumpet bit on his chipped mouthpiece and blew hard. The drummer kicked hard at his foot pedal. The blue gelatin was whirled brassy red. She spun free of the last veil, and her splendid, shimmering body held for a long moment, in the naked night.

She ran swiftly, blindly to a small dressing room. A damp hand grabbed at her breasts as she ran, and pinched her swelled nipples. Hot pain filled her. She pulled away from the gin smelly shadow, and stumbled to her room. Tears wracked her trembling body. She lay nakedly still for an endless moment. A sharp rap at the door jolted her back into awareness.

"Who . . . who is it?"

"Got a note for ya."

"Slip . . . slip it under the door."

"Anyt'ing you say, Duchess."

A long white envelope passed under the splintered door. She picked it up quickly. Slowly, the familiar handwriting focused before her pale blue eyes. She hung on each word. Then, more slowly, more deliberately, she re-read each word.

After a long, frightening moment, she carefully folded the note, slipped it back inside the white linen envelope, and pressed it between the yellowed pages of a paperback pulp mystery she had never quite finished. She slipped into her freshly laundered underthings, carefully adjusted the seams of her sheer hose, and silently stole from the businessman's stag that had netted her fifty dollars.

A street corner tough made a pass. She wheeled past him with a deft step. The steady clip of her high heels rattled against the damp pavement. In a short while, her shadow had slipped out of the melting pot neighborhood.

As the slate gray of early dismal morning crept into the hard city, a crab chewed body washed ashore near the city garbage dump. The afternoon papers called her an 'exotic' dancer.

A slender man with a receding hairline paused in front of the blind Wall Street newsdealer. He fingered the brassy, bold-face headline.

"I saw her . . . once. You should've seen her." The blind newsdealer listened to the intimate description. The sound of an approaching bus jostled the slender businessman back to his senses. He tossed the newspaper back on the cluttered stand.

"Crazy kid. Threw herself in the drink because the boy friend left her for a Miss Fancy Pants from Westbury."

The blind man stacked the paper in the bundle.

"She was putting the bright boy through med school with them stag things. Well . . . that's the way it goes."

The bus reached the corner. The slender aging businessman boarded it gingerly. The doors slammed shut. The motor gunned. And the bus roared away in a belch of hot fumes.

The blind newsdealer made change for his next customer. He tried to get the picture of the girl from his mind. The businessman had described her too well. He dropped the brass holder atop the pile of papers. The rush hour was starting. His fingers fondled the pile of dailies that blared a juicy headline. The Duchess would be forgotten about twenty minutes after dessert . . . or, at the latest, after scrambled eggs the next morning.

WANTED

dead and alive

The movie was to be an epic to end all epics. But it was strictly Grade B compared to the exploits of its gorgeous star.

BY STEPHEN MARLOWE

I was drinking an ouzo-and-water on the aft deck of the car-ferry *Hellas* and watching the lights of Brindisi fade into the Mediteranean darkness when a stocky figure came toward me, lurching slightly with the ship's roll.

"What the hell are you doing aboard?" I said.

"Did I ever say I wouldn't be?"

"Wife see you yet?" I asked.

"In the lounge. A real touching scene. She was looped. As usual."

That made two of them, I thought. Sabastian Spinner's lurch hadn't been all ship's roll. He was gripping the rail hard with both hands to keep the deck from tilting.

"What about the hired gun?"

"Christ, no. If he's aboard, I haven't made him." Spinner sighed ruefully. "Provided I remember what the sonofabitch looks like." A foghorn tooted in the bay, sounding derisive.

Sebastian Spinner was producer-director of *Lucrezia Borgia,* which was being filmed on location all over Italy. Twenty-five million bucks, not Spinner's money, had been pumped into it so far. The studio was near bankruptcy, the picture still wasn't finished and never would be if Spinner's wife kept wandering all over the map, with or without whatever stud struck her fancy at the moment.

It seemed even less likely that the picture would be finished if Spinner's wife, Carole Frazer, who

was playing La Lucrezia, wound up dead on the twenty-six hour steamer trip between Brindisi, Italy, and Patras, Greece. Neither Spinner nor I would make book that she wouldn't. Spinner had hired a Neapolitan killer to hit her in the head.

I'd first bumped into Sebastian Spinner in Rome a couple of weeks ago, when I'd blown myself to a vacation after the Axel Spade case. It was a party, the kind they throw in Cinecita or Hollywood, where somebody dressed to the earlobes always gets tossed into the pool, where an unknown starlet named Simonetta or something like that peels to the waist to prove her astonishing abundancy and where guys like me, if their luck is running bad, get hired by guys like Sebastian Spinner.

"Drum?" he'd said, scooping a couple of martinis off a tray and handing me one. "That wouldn't be Chester Drum?"

I admitted my guilt.

"The private dick?"

"Not very private if you keep shouting it like that."

Spinner laughed phlegmily and clamped my arm with a small, soft hand. He was a stocky bald man, and his face and pate were shiny with sweat.

"They say you're the best in the business," he said, and added modestly: "I'm the best in my business. Sweetheart, if we get together it could be you're gonna save my life. Though sometimes I ain't so sure it's worth the trouble." Spinner was alternately egotistic and self-deprecating, a typical Hollywood type who made me glad I usually worked out of Washington, D.C.

He steered me outside and we drove off into the hot Roman night in his low-slung Facel Vega. He said nothing until we'd parked on the Via Veneto and took a curbside table at Doney's.

"Somebody's gonna hit my wife in the head," he said then. "Christ, they kill her and there goes *Lucrezia Borgia,* not to mention twenty-five million bucks of Worldwide Studio money. If that happens, they wouldn't give me a job sweeping out the latrine of the second unit of one of those goddam grade Z epics made with the Yugoslav army."

I asked: "How do you know somebody's going to kill your wife, Mr. Spinner?" I asked it politely, the way you do with a loquacious drunk.

Spinner recognized my point of view and didn't like it. "On account of I hired the guy," he said indignantly, and then I was all ears.

A few days before, while they were shooting on location outside of Naples, Spinner had gone up to Vomero on a bat. You couldn't blame him. His wife was sleeping with Philip Stanley, her leading man, and everybody knew it.

"I was sitting in this trattoria in Vomero," Spinner said. "I was

gassed to the eyeballs, and all of a sudden it was like that Hitchcock gimmick where two guys meet on a train and . . . You remember the film, don't you?

"Well, I met me a mafiosa type and we started in to talking. I ain't usually the jealous type. Merde, I been married six times, what's an extra-curricular roll in the hay more or less matter, it's a free country, I get yens too. But Carole's been spreading it around and her middle name ain't exactly discretion and this Stanley bastard practically rubs my face in it. No dame's gonna make Sebastian Spinner wear neon horns.

"That's what I tell the mafiosa type, and he nods his head and listens, and pretty soon, like, I'm foaming at the mouth, and finally I shut up. That's when he says, 'for five thousand dollars American I will kill her,' and that's when I say, 'For five thousand dollars American you got yourself a deal,' and the swifty cons me into giving him half of it in advance and walks out of the trattoria after I tell him when the best time to hit Carole in the head would be."

"When would it be?"

He told me about her up-coming trip to Greece. "On the boat," he said. "They got a ferry that runs from Brindisi to Patras. Carole hates to fly."

I watched the traffic swarming along the Via Veneto and being swallowed by the Pinciana Gate. "I take it you sort of changed your mind."

"You bet your sweet life I did. What goes with *Lucrezia Borgia* if Carole gets hit in the head? You tell me that, pal."

"Okay, call your gun off. What do you need me for?"

"I can't call him off."

That got a raised eyebrow from me.

"I don't even know his goddam name, I'm not sure what trattoria in Vomero it was and he had a face like all the other little swifties who'll sell their own sisters for a thousand lira in Naples. Kee-rist, I need a drink."

"Maybe he just let you talk yourself out of twenty-five hundred bucks," I suggested. "What makes you so sure he intends to go through with it?"

"Nothing, sweetheart," Spinner admitted with a slightly sick smile. "Nothing at all. Maybe he *is* laughing up his sleeve down in Vomero. Don't you think I know that?"

"So?"

"So maybe on the other hand he ain't."

I went down to Naples for a few days and prowled all the dives in Vomero without any luck. I got to Brindisi half an hour before the *Hellas* sailed. Now, on the aft deck of the car ferry, I told Spinner:

"Look. Sober up and stay that way. I'll watch your wife, but if the guy's aboard maybe you'll recognize him."

A voice, not Spinner's, said: "I say, old man, don't you feel a bit of a horse's ass following us?" and a man joined us at the rail. In the light streaming through the portholes of the lounge, I recognized Philip Stanley. He was a big guy, about my size, in a navy blue blazer with gold buttons and a pair of gray flannel slacks. He had a hard, handsome face going a little heavy in the jowls, and his eyes held that look of smug, inbred self-satisfaction they seem to give out along with the diplomas at Eton and Harrow and the other public schools that turn out the members of the British Establishment. Actually, he had grown up in a Birmingham slum, and it had taken him all his life to cultivate that look of supercilious disdain.

"Sweetheart," Spinner said, "I never dreamed Carole would pack her playmate for the trip. Maybe she's slipping if she don't think she can do better in Greece. A lot better. They're pretty torrid in the sack, those Greeks, what I hear."

Stanley laughed. "Better than you she can always do, at any rate. But tell me, old boy," he asked dryly, "would you be speaking about those Greeks from personal experience?"

Spinner took a drunken, clumsy swing at him. Evading it easily, Stanley grabbed his wrist and levered the plump man a few staggering steps along the deck before letting go. Spinner fell down and leaped up again as if he had springs in his shoes.

I got between them, and Spinner said gratefully, "Hold me back, Drum. Hold me back, sweetheart. Every mark I put on his face'll cost Worldwide half a million bucks."

Stanley snickered, and neatly turned his broad back, and walked away along the rail. Spinner shuffled toward the door to the lounge. I lit a cigarette and followed the Englishman. A few more minutes away from Carole Frazer wouldn't hurt. Spinner would have the sense to keep an eye on her until I showed up.

"Got a few minutes?" I asked Stanley.

"Twenty-five hours to Patras," he said, leaning both elbows on the rail and staring down at the frothy white wake. "But just who are you?"

"Drum," I said crisply. "Worldwide front office."

"I never heard of you."

"You're not supposed to—until I land on you with both feet."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning if I can't get some assurance *Lucrezia*'ll be in the cutter's room inside of six months, the front office is half-inclined to chuck the whole works."

Stanley straightened and turned suddenly in my direction. He looked worried. "Are you serious?"

"Sure I am," I said. Though with his rugged Anglo-Saxon

good looks Philip Stanley was about as far from a hungry little Neapolitan killer as you could get, the more I knew about the principals in the case the better I'd be able to handle whatever developed. "The director's been throwing a bat all the way from the Italian Alps to Callabria and between takes the stars go hop-scotching from bed to bed all over Europe. You think maybe Worldwide's wild about that?"

"I'll admit I've slept with Carole," Stanley said, "but—"

"Admit it? Hell, everybody knows it."

"But I had hoped to keep her somewhat closer to the set by doing it."

"That's what I like about you box-office big-shots. Your modesty."

"I am afraid you misunderstand," Stanley said, and a tortoni wouldn't have melted in his mouth. "Naturally I've gotten a certain amount of publicity as Carole's leading man, but I am not, as you put it, a box-office big-shot. I will be, if we ever finish *Lucrezia.* Otherwise I'll just be another not-quite-matinee-idol knocking at the back doors of Cinecita for work."

Him and Sebastian Spinner both, I thought. The only one who didn't seem to mind was Carole Frazer.

"Damn it all," he went on, "why d'you think we're languishing a year behind schedule? Because I've slept with Carole? That's nonsense, old boy. I don't have to tell you the women's a nymphomaniac, if a lovely one. But if it isn't me then it's someone else, and that's only the half of it. Carole was rushed to London three times for emergency medical treatment, and each time as I also don't have to tell you it was some psychosomatic foolishness. Why, she's only appeared in half a dozen crucial scenes so far, close-ups, and virtually every far shot's been done by her stand-in. We have a great deal more footage of the stand-in than we do of Carole. If you doubt my word, ask Spinner. And Dawn Sibley's no mere double, she's a fine actress in her own right. Sometimes I think it would be simpler all around if we were to chuck Carole and let Dawn do *Lucrezia.* I don't stand alone. Ask around, old boy, and then tell *that* to the front office. Most of us want to see this film completed as much as you do. But unfortunately it was conceived as a vehicle for Carole."

After that long tirade, he had nothing else to say. I watched him walk across the deck and inside. For a little while I listened to the rush of water under the hull-plates. Brindisi was a faint and distant line of light. Overhead a gull, nailed in silhouette against the starlit sky, screamed and flapped its wings once. When I looked again, only a glow remained on the

horizon in the direction of Brindisi. I carried my empty ouzo glass to the lounge.

At a big table near the bar, Carole Frazer was holding court. She was wearing black tapered slacks and a paisley blouse that fondled her high breasts without hugging them lasciviously. A casual lock of her blond hair had fallen across her right eye and right cheek. A languid smile that did not quite part her moist red lips was the reward her suitors got.

There were about a dozen of them, most of them dark and slender Italians and Greeks with intense eyes and gleaming teeth. Any one of them, I realized, could have been Sebastian Spinner's little swifty from Vomero. He'd be as easy to single out as a fingerling in a fish hatchery.

"Ouzo," I told the barman, and he poured the anis-flavored liquor and added enough water to turn it milky. His hand was not steady on the carafe, and he sloshed a little water on the bar. In the world that Hollywood made, Carole Frazer was an institution. He was staring at her bugeyed. I couldn't blame him. Seen close, her blond beauty was really scorching.

Spinner sat alone at a table nearby. He was drinking Scotch and darting small, anxious glances at the men clustered around his wife. Each time he'd shake his head slightly, and his eyes would flick on like a snake's tongue. He had trouble keeping his head off the table. He was very drunk.

I went over to him and sat down. "Any luck?"

"Nope. Maybe he's here. Maybe not. I can't tell them apart, bunch a goddam Chinamen."

"Lay off the sauce," I suggested, "and you won't see double."

Carole Frazer called across to us in her throaty purr of a voice. "Mister, if you can make him do that, you're a better man than his psychiatrist. Who are you?"

"I'm his new psychiatrist," I said, and she laughed, and then she lost interest in us as the dark heads bobbed and the white teeth flashed all around her. She lapped up male adulation the way a thirsty kitten laps up milk.

Pretty soon Spinner told me, "Gonna hit the sack. It's no use. You'll keep an eye on her?"

I said that was why I was here, and he lurched across the lounge toward the companionway that led to the *Hellas* de luxe staterooms. A while later Carole Frazer got up and stretched like a cat, every muscle of her lithe body getting into the act. The Italians and Greeks went pop-eyed, watching. She patted the nearest dark head, said, "Down, boy," and, "Arrivederci" and went in the direction her husband had gone. But that didn't necessarily mean she was going to find him. After all, her leading man Philip Stanley was aboard too.

Finishing my ouzo, I went in search of the purser's office. It was located in the first class entrance foyer. A kid in a white uniform sat there reading a letter and sighing.

"What's the number of Carole Frazer's stateroom?" I asked him.

"Kyros," he said smoothly, "the next time you see the lady, why not ask her?"

He smiled. I smiled and studied half a dozen travel brochures spread out on the counter. I picked one of them up. In English, French and Italian it described the delights of a motor trip that could be made from Athens to Delphi and back in a day.

"How much?" I asked.

"Depending on whether you wish a chauffeur or a self-drive car, kyros—"

"No. I mean the brochure."

"That is free, kyros, compliments of the Adriatic Line."

I pocketed the folder and dropped a fifty drachma note on the counter. "Fifty?" I said. "That seems fair enough."

"But I just—" he began, and then his eyes narrowed and his lips just missed smiling. "De Luxe Three, starboard side," he said without moving his mouth, and returned to his letter.

The starboard de luxe companionway ended at a flight of metal stairs going up. At the top was a door and beyond that a narrow deck above the boat-deck, with three doors numbered one, two and three spaced evenly along it. There were wide windows rather than portholes, all of them curtained and two of them dark. Faint light seaped through the third. It was Carole Frazer's cabin.

Looking at it, I liked the setup. Door and window both outside, on this deck. If I spent the night here, nobody could reach Carole Frazer without me knowing it. I listened to the throb of the ship's engines and looked at my watch. It was a quarter to one. I sat down between the door and the window of Carole Frazer's stateroom. The bulk of the Magnum .44 in its clam-shell rig under my left arm was uncomfortable. I shifted the holster around a little, but that didn't help. No one has ever inivented a shoulder holster that is comfortable, just as no one has ever invented any other way of wearing a revolver the size of a Magnum and hiding it when what else you are wearing is a lightweight seersucker suit.

For about an hour I kept a silent vigile. Nobody screamed, no Vomero swifty came stalking up stairs, nothing happened except that the *Hellas* covered another twenty-five miles of Adriatic Sea.

And then I heard voices. The only thing that wasn't de luxe about the half-dozen de luxe staterooms aboard the *Hellas* was the sound-proofing. Well, you couldn't have everything.

"Awake?" a man asked.

"Uh-huh."

"Like another drink?"

"My head's spinning right now."

"Just one more? With me?"

"All right."

Silence while Philip Stanley and Carole Frazer had a post-nightcap nightcap. Like any private dick, I'd been called a peeper more than once. Like any private dick, I'd never liked it. I'd done my share of peeping—or anyway listening—but never outside a woman's bedroom. The one kind of work I don't do is divorce work. But if the hired gun was going to make his move, it figured to be during the night. "Peeper," I muttered sourly under my breath, and remained where I was.

"Oh, Phil," Carole Frazer said, and her voice was more throaty than it had been in the lounge. "When you do that—"

"What's wrong, don't you like it?"

"You know I do. I love it. But I'm so —drunky. Head going around and 'round."

Another silence. Then he laughed, and she laughed and said: "Phil, you amaze me." She called him a brief Anglo-Saxon word that is usually not a term of endearment, but her voice made it sound endearing. Then she laughed again, deep in her throat, and then she said, "You keep this up, you're going to screw yourself right into the wall," and then after that there was silence for a long time.

I must have half-dozed. I blinked suddenly and realized that the night had grown cooler and I had grown stiff from sitting in one position for so long. I glanced at the luminous dial of my watch. After three o'clock. It would be dawn before long, and still no sign of the Vomero swifty.

There was a faint click, and the stateroom door opened enough for Philip Stanley to poke his head out and take a quick look to left and right. The one way he didn't look was down, where I was sitting. His head popped back inside, and the door shut softly. I remained where I was.

The door opened again. This time Stanley came out. He was carrying a suitcase, and from the way his shoulder slumped it looked heavy. He took it to the rail, set it down and placed a coil of rope on top of it. I froze, absolutely still. If he turned right on his way back to the stateroom he would see me. If he turned left, he wouldn't.

He turned left and went inside again. What the hell was he up to?

In a few seconds he reappeared with Carole Frazer cradled in his arms. He was fully dressed. She wasn't dressed any way at all. She mumbled against his ear. He set her down, gently, next to the suitcase. For a while longer I sat there like someone who had walked in on the middle of a movie and didn't know what the hell was happening on the screen or why. Stanley tied

the rope to the handle of the suitcase, uncoiled the rest of it, took two turns around the suitcase, passed the rope through the handle once more, took four or five turns around Carole Frazer's body under the arms, passed the rope through the handle a third time and knotted it.

Carole Frazer mumbled again, faintly complaining. She was as drunk as Bacchus. He ignored her until she said, "It's cold out here. I'm cold. What's the matter with you? I don't—"

He clipped her once, behind the left ear, with his fist, just as I started to get up in a hurry. I had the Magnum in my hand.

"Need some help with your package?" I said. "Kind of heavy for one man to get over the rail."

The gun meant nothing to him. He cried out once, hoarsely, and came for me. The big Magnum could have ripped a hole the size of a saucer in him, but I didn't fire. When you get trigger happy you're not long for my line of work, despite any evidence to the contrary on TV.

Stanley lunged as a bull lunges, horns and head down, going for the muleta. I took his head in chancery under my arm, and his weight slammed us both against the wall. It jarred him loose. I was stiff from my long vigil, and he was fighting for his life. What I'd seen was attempted murder, and he knew it. He butted me. My teeth clicked and my head jolted the wall a second time. He stepped back, almost gracefully, and kicked me in the gut. Right around there I began to wish I had used the gun.

But by then it was too late. We hit the deck together, Stanley on top, me trying my best to remember how to breathe and Stanley clamping a hand like a Stilson wrench on my right wrist so I couldn't use the Magnum. I cuffed his head, somewhat indolently, with my left hand. He cuffed mine, harder, with his right. I tasted blood in my mouth. At least I had begun to breathe again, and that was something.

All of a sudden the Magnum went off. The big slug hit the window of Carole Frazer's stateroom, and glass crashed down all around us. I judo-chopped the side of Stanley's neck. His weight left me as he went over sideways. I got up before he did, but not by much. His eyes were wild. He knew that shot was going to bring company.

He swung a right that sailed past my ear, and I hooked a left that hit bone somewhere on his face. He dropped to his knees and got up and dropped to them again.

I heard footsteps pounding up the metal staircase. Stanley heard them too. Two faces and two white, black-visored caps appeared. Stanley did not try to get up again right away. There was a dark and glistening stain on the deck below him. He stared down at it, fascinat-

ed. He touched his throat. Blood pumped, welling through his fingers.

The two ship's officers saw the gun in my hand and remained where they were.

A shard of flying glass had hit Stanley in the throat. The way the blood pumped, an artery had to be severed.

"There a doctor aboard?" I said, going to Stanley. "This man needs help in a hurry."

But he got to his feet and backed away from me. Who knows what a guy will do when he's a little drunk, and half-crazy with fear, and in danger of bleeding to death?

"Keep away from me," he said.

"You crazy? You won't last ten minutes bleeding like that."

Smiling faintly he said, "I'm afraid I wouldn't come on very well as a convict, old boy."

Then he took a single step to the rail and went over.

They stopped the ship. They always do, but it rarely helps. We covered another mile, and turned sharp to port, and came back. Three life-preservers were floating in the water, where the ship's officers had thrown them. But Philip Stanley was gone.

On deck after lunch and after I'd made and signed a deposition for the *Hellas'* captain, Spinner said: "I don't get it. You think I'm nuts or something? There was this little swifty in Vomero. I know there was."

"Sure," I said. "Stanley hired him, but his job ended in Vomero."

"Stanley hired him?"

"To make you think you'd hired yourself a killer. If your wife had disappeared during the crossing, you'd have kept your mouth shut about the possibility of foul play if you thought your own man had done it."

"Why did Stanley want her dead?" Skinner squealed.

"Because the picture was more important to him. He got scared they'd never finish it, the way Carole was carrying on." I lit a cigarette. "Hell, he told me last night how he wanted Carole's understudy to take over. She almost did."

Carole Frazer joined us on deck. She was wearing a bikini and stretched out languidly in the bright, hot sun. She didn't look at all like a girl who'd almost been murdered a few hours ago.

"Watch the sun," Spinner warned her. "La Lucrezia's pale, baby." He sighed. "That is, if you're gonna do the picture after what you been through."

"Do it?" Carole asked sleepily. "But of course I'll do it, darling. The publicity will be marvelous."

It was, and after our night aboard the *Hellas,* Carole Frazer settled down to work. They made *Lucrezia Borgia* with a new leading man. Carole Frazer's up for an Oscar.

RETIRE-MENT

BY ROBERT EDMOND ALTER

Not likely . . . but possible. Anyway, a fit end to a vile career.

THE OLD BEACHCOMBER groaned wearily when he heard the raucous voice of the woman known as his wife calling for him. An hour earlier he had sneaked off to the bush to try to steal a solitary nap among the roots of a great banyan tree, and already the fat fool of a woman had tracked him down with that half-wild dog of hers.

Yes, he could hear the dog now, snuffing and chuffing up the wild-pig run of a path with its nose to the ground like a vacuum cleaner. Someday he was going to kill that damned dog; at least he liked to tell himself that he would, some day. But the truth was that he was afraid to kill the dog, because the woman known as his wife was the niece of old Balu the devil-devil, the witch doctor, and she seemingly had inherent ways of knowing everything that he, the beachcomber, did. And if she ever found out that he killed her dog, well . . .

"You come now! You come now!" The shrill voice ripped through the aerial vegetation that hung parasitically from the high matted roof of the jungle overhead. "You come along legs belong you damn fast!"

The tired old beachcomber groaned again, and then broke into a concatenated string of vile curse words as the wedge-faced, malevolent-eyed dog shot through the nipa palms and charged under the

banyan roots to snarl and snap at the white man's skinny bare ankle.

Insult upon injury. He could hear the fat fool of a woman roaring with laughter as he and the dog went around and around against the crowding, elbow-cracking, head-banging banyan roots. He hated her for her loud belly laughter. To him, the great torso-shaking bellows of vocal humor were maddening. He had found precious little to laugh about during the last seventeen years.

Finally the woman called the dog off, expediting matters with some handy sticks and stones and a weird mixture of vivid Melanesian and beche-de-mer English curse words. The brute slunk off backrolling its near eye and lifting its lip over its long white teeth. The woman placed her hamlike fists on her thickly padded hips and glared into the shadows under the belly of the tree.

"You come now," she ordered the crouching beachcomber sternly. "I make one fella job belong you. You savvy?"

He savvied. She was always creating 'one fella job' for him; one disgusting, degrading chore after another. He wished that he wasn't so afraid of her, that his life (if you could call it that) didn't more or less depend upon her patronage. He wished he had the nerve to tell her to go straight to hell.

"I'm tired!" he complained peevishly, childishly. "I need my nap." Though how he could hope to get it in the suffocating heat with the mosquitoes sniping him and the nameless, ghastly little bugs crawling all over him was more than he knew. "It's not fair that I have to do all the work. It's not right! Twenty years ago I had thousands of—"

The fat block of a woman snorted contemptuously, cutting him short.

"You shut fella mouth belong you," she snapped. "Allatime gammon, gammon, gammon twenty years ago this, twenty years ago that. Too much talk, big bit. Too little work, little bit. You come along me."

And that was the way it always was. Every time he tried to tell these witless aborigines of his once-upon-a-time greatness, of his worldly importance twenty, thirty years ago, they laughed at him and the woman known as his wife set him another unsavory chore to do.

It was maddening. It was unfair. How could a man come this far down in the world? Where was the justice in it all?

Perhaps, he reflected bitterly, he had made his mistake by being in too much of a hurry when he had first reached the out-of-the-way island eleven, twelve years ago; though he hadn't thought so at the time. In fact, he had thought he was being very methodical and precise. It was true that he had ar-

rived in a rather harum-scarum condition—alone and ragged in the leaky outrigger he had stolen in Fiji, half starved and with nothing to call his own except for the rusty pistol with the three dubious cartridges; but—in relation to the past—he had started out with no more than that once before and look where it had taken him.

The Melanesians had accepted his arrival with good-natured indifference. They were used to itinerant white men. They still remembered the missionaries and the southsea traders and, from a later era, the Allied soldiers. If this strangely gutteral-speaking man with the bright eyes of a frightened fanatic wished to stay with them it was his business. They left him alone, thinking he would do as much for them. But they were wrong.

You couldn't say that he had been aggressive right from the beginning, because for the first two months he did nothing except eat their food and sleep in their huts and study the barbarous locutions of their beche-de-mer English (their Melanesian tongue was far beyond his capabilities). Then he had gone into action.

He had called together a mass meeting and, from the top of an unlevel mangrove stump, he had harangued the dark-skinned crowd for one hour, creating a gleaming paradise of promises, telling them in detail all the wonders he was going to accomplish for their glorious future, and telling them that they, his children, would have to accept his word blindly in all things because he was their god.

The natives had found the man and his speech vastly amusing—right up to the point about the god-business. That stuck in their throats. They had been hearing this white-god nonsense for four-hundred years and they were sick to death of it. It was old hat. It had gone out with the war. They pulled him from the stump and took his pistol away from him, and old Balu the devil-devil had rubbed his grimy palms in anticipation of at last having a head which he could smoke and cure and shrink, and later sell to a tourist.

But Faimungo, Balu's fat niece, said no. She had taken a singular fancy to the disreputable-looking, loud-mouthed white man and had decided that she wanted him for a husband. The beachcomber had had nothing to say about it at all. It was Faimungo or it was death; and death was something that he had never, never been able to face. And so they were married.

"You come now," Faimungo told him for the last time, and she selected a wicked-looking stick from the ground to impress upon him the fact that it was the last time. "Tourist fella come along boat. You go along Balu, fetch one-times-three heads belong him. Sell 'em close up. You savvy?"

Tourists! The beachcomber's mind balked at the word. Tourists on the island! Again the old old fear of recognition came and he started to draw further back among the banyan roots. But he hesitated, realizing the absurdity of his fear. There was no doubt that he was still wanted, but no one would be looking for an emaciated, white-bearded, ragged old man of seventy-some. No, their minds would still be hampered by the image he had left them in the old days—middle-aged, husky, dark-haired, with certain outstanding facial characteristics. No, he was quite safe. Time had insured a perfect disguise.

But the idea of standing on the beach with the half naked, ringworm-decorated aborigines selling shrunken heads to tourists was unthinkable. His tarnished pride revolted. He came out from under the tree with his tattered pants slapping against his spindly shanks and wagged a little finger at his wife.

"I can't work today, you hear? I don't feel well. Belly belong me walkabout too much. Sick, sick, sick. You get someone else to—"

Faimungo gave him a poke in the stomach with the end of the stick. "Mouth belong you walkabout too much," she said. "Allatime gammon, gammon can't work, too sick, too tired. All lies! You go along beach together. Fast, fast. By damn yes!" She began herding him down the wild-pig run with well-directed jabs from the end of the stick.

The old beachcomber trotted right along in a near panic of haste. Faimungo's word was law, and the point of the stick was nearly as sharp as her voice.

So now he stood on the beach with his naked, ringwormed, semi-savage brethren, as they dangled their primitive trinkets and showed their weird ceremonial masks and their old war clubs and tomahawks and knives to the cautiously amused shore party of tourists and seamen from the expensive-looking yacht burning white in the sun on the translucent blue lagoon.

He stood there like a singular display of aging decadence, creating an unintentional travesty on barkerdom, with the three ghastly shrunken heads in his hands, holding them by their stringy hair, hating them, and hating the Melanesians and the tourists and the seamen and their white yacht too. But it was either this or go hungry, and he knew it. No work, no food, was Faimungo's rule. He hawked his wares.

"Shrunken heads!" he called in his tired clacky voice. "Fine, authentic shrunken heads, reasonable!"

The tourists were mostly females in their autumn years and they were acting girlishly awed over this not-too-romantic glimpse into

primordial life. The seamen tagged indifferently after them serving as guides and exchange monitors. They weren't amused or awed by the Melanesians or their wares. They had seen it all before. They carried cartons of cigarettes as barter, should the tourists see some trinket or other that they simply had to take home to show to their friends or relatives.

A matronly woman with small blue fluid eyes, followed by a Mick-faced, middle-aged, bored seaman, came down the gesticulating line of hawking natives hesitantly, nodding and half smiling as she said, dubiously, over and over, "Yes—yes, that's very nice. But no thank you." Then she approached the sullen, tattered beachcomber.

"Shrunken heads," he clacked automatically. "Fine, authentic shrunken heads, reasonable." He raised a pipestem arm and dangled an eye- and mouth-stitched, baseball-sized head enticingly.

The matronly woman faltered in mid-step and placed a pudgy hand to her pigeon breast. "Oh," she said bleakly. "Goodness."

The Mick-faced seaman glanced at the beachcomber and his heads and spoke depreciatingly. "It's all right, Mrs. Gold. All them heads is mostly fakes. It's for the tourist trade. These people haven't headhunted since the 'Thirties."

Mrs. Gold. The beachcomber raged with mute anti-Semitic feeling. This was what he was reduced to: trying to peddle shrunken heads to a fat female named Gold for a carton of cigarettes. But at least he could show her that he still had his dignity. "Madam," he said hoarsely, "these heads are authentic. They are very very old. They—" Then he shut up, suddenly and acutely aware of the degrading irony of his speech. He was actually trying to defend the ghastly little withered heads!

Mrs. Gold appeared to be more interested in the beachcomber than in his shrunken heads. She gave him an odd, canted look, saying, "Why, you're a white man," making an almost-positive statement of it.

The Mick-faced seaman grunted. "Uh-huh. You'll find 'em all over the shop out here. Beachcombers. They live off the natives mostly."

The offhand explanation seemed too pat for Mrs. Gold's sense of order. She said, worriedly, "But surely the poor man deserves better than—than this form of existence." She gestured vaguely toward the dangling heads in the old man's clawed hands. "Couldn't something be done for him? I mean to say, isn't there a—a home or something on that order for the elderly destitute, say in Sydney or—"

The seaman was shaking his head disparagingly. He knew better. He knew the beachcomber's sort. "You couldn't get 'em to go to it if there was," he informed her. "You put 'em in an old man's

home and they wither right up and die. But out here on the beach they seem to live forever. Anyhow, old stagers like him don't usually have papers, and they don't appreciate anybody prying into their past with a lot of red-tape questions. Right, dad?"

So this is what it had come to. The old beachcomber was sick with anguish. Pity from such a woman. It was too much to bear. It was the last straw. Fiercely he rooted about in the webby corners of the man he had once been, looking for some of his old old burning-bright anger; and he found just enough to draw himself up stiffly and fix Mrs. Gold with an arctic look of scorn.

"Madam," he said shrilly, "you may keep your Semitic pity. I don't need it. Do you wish to buy one of these heads or not?"

Mrs. Gold studied him pensively, before saying, "I'm sorry. I didn't intend to offend you. No—thank you—I really wouldn't care for one of those heads." She turned away, pausing to speak to the seaman in sotto voce. "Give him a carton of cigarettes, or if he needs money—"

"Keep your filthy money!" the old beachcomber cried, his voice high and cracking with impotent fury. "I don't want your patronage! Do you know who you're talking to? Do you? Do you know who I am?"

And then, insanely, he chucked the years of caution and fear away and leaped out of hiding. He told them, shouting his name at them. Then he realized he was still holding the wretched little heads in his trembling hands and, wildly, he threw them into the sand at his feet and placed a hand on his concave chest, melodramatically.

Mrs. Gold and the seaman stared at him blankly for a hushed moment. Then the seaman's face twisted a wry smile and he winked imperceptibly at Mrs. Gold. "They-'re all more or less that way," he muttered.

Mrs. Gold nodded absently and turned away again, whispering, "Just the same—the cigarettes, please."

The seaman hung back to grin at the beachcomber. "Good show, dad," he said, and he tossed one of his cartons of cigarettes at the old man's bare feet. Then he hurried after Mrs. Gold.

The beachcomber stared emptily at the carton of cigarettes. They hadn't believed him. After all the scared, vile years of being buried alive in savage obscurity, they wouldn't accept him when he came into the open. They thought him demented.

He kicked viciously at the carton of cigarettes, hurting his bare big toe. He turned and ran limping into the jungle, heedless of the shooting pain in his foot and the jeering hoots of the Melanesians. He ran with his blinding mortification.

He entered the dog-yapping, brat-squally, fly-pestered, ratty village and scrambled up the rickety ladder to the hut he shared with Faimungo, and crawled into a foul-smelling corner in despair.

And he wasn't even allowed to have that to himself.

Already Faimungo's raucous voice was seeking him. And in a minute that damned dog would sniff him out. He groaned and closed his eyes and put his damp face into his hands. When would it end? When? Wasn't he ever to die a nice peaceful death of old age? He sobbed, wishing again—as he had been wishing every day for years—that he had had the courage to commit suicide in that long-ago night when he had known that it was over, irrevocably finished.

Faimungo's omnipresent voice advanced irritably.

"You come now! You come now! I make one fella job belong you. Adolf! You savvy?"

the good citizen

BY BERNARD EPPS

It's always a big help when the police can find an eyewitness to a crime.

YOU MIND moving that light, lieutenant? It's shining right in my eyes."

"That's so I can see if you're telling the truth, Benny."

"I never told a lie in my life, lieutenant. I got witnesses. They'll tell you. I never told a lie in my life."

"Sure. You've probably got witnesses that will swear to anything. Just answer a few questions and we'll worry about witnesses later. I'll start with an easy one. Why do they call you Side-Street Benny?"

"That's easy. They call me Side Street Benny because that's my name."

"According to the record, it's Benjamin Franklin Featherstone."

"It is?"

"That's right, so why do they call you Side-Street Benny?"

"Beats me, lieutenant. I never heard anyone call me Benjamin Franklin Whatisname."

"You ever been arrested, Benny?"

"In fact, anyone wants to try calling me Benjamin Franklin Whatsisname and I'll take a poke at him!"

"You ever been arrested?"

"Sure. Once or twice. Hasn't everyone?"

"Once or twice?"

"Maybe three, four times."

"How many times you been arrested, Benny?"

"This makes number twenty-four."

"That's right. You've got a good memory."

"Gee, thanks, lieutenant."

"You remember what you were arrested for?"

"I don't know. I was just walking down the street, picking up a few butts and you grab me. I wasn't even drunk, lieutenant. I got witnesses to that."

"Sure. But I meant, do you remember what you were arrested for the other twenty-three times?"

"Thirteen times for vag, nine for drunk and once for robbing a movie theater."

"Right again. You have a good memory."

"I never robbed that theater, lieutenant. I was just asking the price of the tickets and the girl got scared and shoved the money into my hand. I wasn't robbing her, lieutenant."

"Sure. Then why were you running off with the five hundred?"

"What five hundred is that?"

"The five hundred belonging to the ticket office."

"O, *that* five hundred. Like I told the judge, what would you do if someone handed you five hundred out of the blue? You going to wait around to ask questions? I never had more than two dollars together in my life, lieutenant. I can prove it. I got witnesses."

"All right. Now the questions are going to get a little harder. Where were you last night?"

"Twenty-four arrests ain't bad but I know a guy has forty-six."

"Is he one of your witnesses?"

"Nawl He's my brother-in-law. He gets drunk every Saturday and beats on my sister a little bit. She calls the fuzz, they lock him up. Every Saturday night, regular as regular."

"All right. Now, where were you last night?"

"It's not that I blame him. I used to give her a poke now and then myself when I was younger. She's that kind of woman."

"What kind is that?"

"The kind, if you listen to her long enough, you just naturally have to get up and hit her a couple licks."

"Sure. But you still didn't answer my question."

"What question was that?"

"Where were you last night between ten p.m. and midnight?"

"They're getting harder, ain't they?"

"That's right. But you've got a good memory."

"Sure have. Ask me who won the Derby in nineteen twenty-three. Go ahead, ask me!"

"I asked you where you were last night."

"O yeah. What time you interested in?"

"Between ten p.m. and twelve."

"Yeah. Well. Last night I didn't have enough for a flop, see. I only had two bits and we usually keep that for the morning—you get two wines for a quarter, see, that's the

eye-opener and then you hit the stem and sweat it out. But some guys I . . ."

"Just tell me where you were last night."

"That's what I was trying to do! I didn't have enough for a flop so me and this other guy—Silent Sam Smith they call him on account of he don't talk very much—me and Silent Sam went down to the railroad yards, see, near the docks."

"Why?"

"To sleep, of course. A man needs his rest and there's a dump there where they throw all these empty boxes and you can make a kind of shelter in wet weather up against the building."

"What time did you get there?"

"Of course, it's wasn't raining last night but the corrugated boxes are soft to sleep on and the cops don't bother you in that part of town."

"What time did you get there?"

"Let's see, Silent Sam bought a poor-boy of Tokay in this liquor store on Tenth Street and the guy was just closing up. So that must have been around ten o'clock. Then we walked maybe an hour or more. Sam don't like to move too quick when he's got a bottle under his coat."

"So that would make it between eleven and eleven-thirty when you got to the railroad yards."

"He says he's always scared if he hurries, he'll trip and smash the bottle. So he walks real careful and that's how come it took so long."

"Did you see anyone near the docks?"

"No, sir! We didn't see a thing! You ask Silent. He'll tell you. We didn't see *nothing*."

"Then you heard something?"

"Well, I *did* hear something that could have been a woman screaming and something else that could have been gunshots, but I won't swear to it."

"How many shots did you hear?"

"I didn't say they were shots. I said they *could* have been shots."

"How many?"

"There could have been two."

"And you didn't see anything?"

"No, sir, lieutenant. We didn't see a thing. You can ask Silent. He'll tell you. We didn't see nothing."

"So what did you do after you heard the shots?"

"Silent went on across the tracks with his jug but he wouldn't share it with me so I walked around a bit until he'd have drunk it. It's a sad thing to see a man drinking alone. A very sad sight indeed."

"Where did you go?"

"Just around. Down street a little way."

"Toward the direction of the shots?"

"Yeah. And I almost got run over crossing the street. You ought to do something about those crazy drivers, lieutenant. A man's not safe on the streets anymore."

"Did you get a good look at the car?"

"Best in the world. It was right

under a street-lamp so he must have seen me but he kept on coming and almost run me down."

"Can you describe the car?"

"It was a green '59 Chevrolet Biscayne. I even remember the license number. Nothing wrong with *my* memory."

"Do you know anything about the woman that was killed?"

"Only what I seen in the papers. Me and Silent Sam go over to this newsstand almost every morning to read the headlines. Silent believes in keeping up with the international situation."

"So you know who she was."

"It said she was in the writing racket, working on a scandal magazine. Something about corruption in the city government."

"Thanks, Benny. I think we can turn off this light now."

"Silent Sam and me, we worked out a theory, lieutenant. We figure she found something on a big shot in City Hall or somewhere and she tried to shake him down. Blackmail is a pretty risky racket and I figure whoever she was blackmailing wouldn't stand for it and had her knocked over."

"That's pretty good, Benny. I'm glad you're on our side. Come over here to the window a minute."

"What's up?"

"See that car down there?"

"Where?"

"Straight down on this side of the street and a little to the left. See it?"

"That's a long way down, ain't it?"

"Is that the car you saw last night?"

"Yeah. I see it. Parked right outside. I can't see the license but it's the same make and color all right. It's even got the same kind of sticker on the window."

"Look close, now."

"Yeah. I'd swear to it! Hey, maybe it belongs to someone in this building here and maybe it had some connec . . ."

"Hello? Hello? Captain? We'd better get an ambulance outside right away. The old bum just jumped out the window. Yes, sir. . . . He even remembered my license number . . ."

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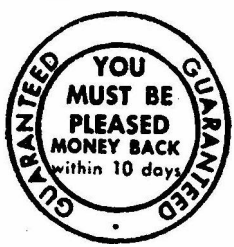
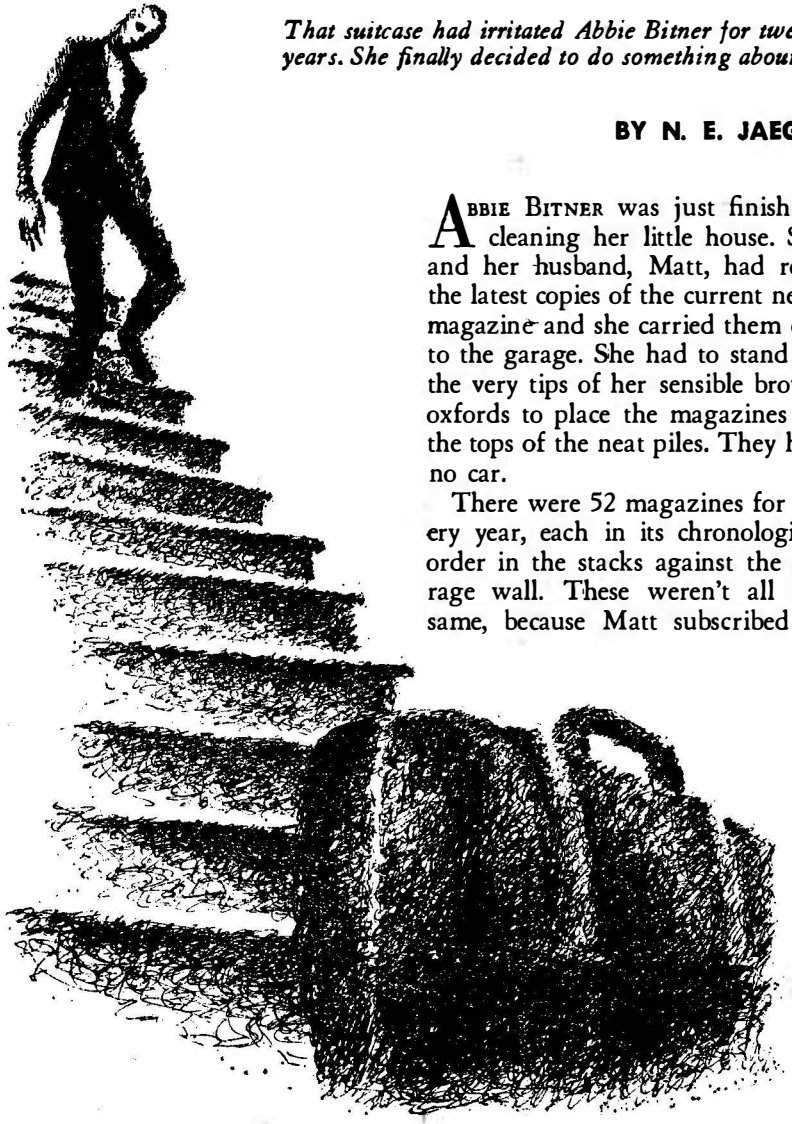


THE SUITCASE



That suitcase had irritated Abbie Bitner for twelve years. She finally decided to do something about it.

BY N. E. JAEGER

ABBIE BITNER was just finishing cleaning her little house. She and her husband, Matt, had read the latest copies of the current news magazine and she carried them out to the garage. She had to stand on the very tips of her sensible brown oxfords to place the magazines on the tops of the neat piles. They had no car.

There were 52 magazines for every year, each in its chronological order in the stacks against the garage wall. These weren't all the same, because Matt subscribed to

whichever one offered the best rate. They didn't take any newspapers because, Matt said, they were an added expense which he could avoid, and besides they could learn anything they really needed to know from the weekly news magazines and the TV broadcasts.

Back in the house Abbie shivered. It was almost more comfortable in the clear frosty outdoors than in the dank kitchen. But she shrugged acceptance and went down the basement steps, being careful to avoid the space second-from-the-top. That particular board had been of extremely inferior quality and had rotted completely away a few years previously. Matt had written to the insurance company several times, but the company maintained it was normal wear and tear.

Abbie folded the laundry in the basement and carried it up the two flights of stairs to the bedroom.

And that was when she broke the normal methodical habits of her 12 years of married life.

She opened Matt's underwear drawer, wincing at its rasp, and frowned at the brown leather suitcase which took up half the space. She had frowned at it in just the same way twice a week for 12 years. Questions as to its contents brought no answer from Matt. Only a satisfied smirk.

The case was locked.

This Friday Abbie broke precedent. She removed the suitcase, making room for neat piles of undergarments and socks.

Then she stared down at the case for several minutes.

Bitner's little house was inherited from Matt's mother. Abbie had married Matt 12 years ago when his mother had died. He had been stumblingly affectionate, and pointed out that he needed her, Abbie, because he "liked things nice around the house". Her own prospects at the time were not very bright. She was 27 midst a family which advocated young marriages. Her parents never explained why they approved of young marriages. They had married late in life, had two children, lost Abbie's brother in the Korean war, and then, grieving, died.

Abbie had needed Matt just as much as he had needed her.

On the first day of her marriage she learned that Matt's mother had always fired the furnace. Economically too, Matt said.

The little house contained a medium sized living room, tiny kitchen and bath downstairs, and the single bedroom upstairs. Matt had slept on the couch in the living room while his mother lived.

There was storage all along the eaves on each side of the bedroom, but Abbie was allotted only a small section for her own things. Matt had filled the remainder with a multitude of items he wished to keep.

"You never know when a thing

will come in handy and be just the right ticket," Matt said.

Abbie took a deep breath, picked up Matt's suitcase, and carried it down to the basement.

Then she looked around the tiny kitchen to make sure everything was put away and exactly right. She took out the pressure cooker and placed it on the stove, idly wondering what Matt would bring home for supper. He did all the shopping. They nearly always used the pressure cooker because the cheaper cuts of meat would be tender, and also it took far less fuel.

A glance at the clock sent Abbie back to the basement. Matt would be home in half an hour, so it was time they could have a little more heat. Mentally gauging the number of coals on the shovel, she carefully placed two shovelsfull in the small furnace.

Now all she had to do was wait. Soon heat would pour through the three registers, the pressure regulator would be whistling and dancing over their supper, and the TV newscast would inform them of the day's events. The latter would be after Matt replaced the tube which prevented operation of the TV set during the day. He took a tube to work with him every day.

"It takes away temptation," he explained. "It's a waste of time for anyone to have entertainment during regular working hours.

All would be cozy and comfortable in the little house on Garland street tonight. Abbie had seen to it, just as she always had.

Matt Bitner hurried through the door, closing it quickly behind him to keep in the heat. He was a small neutral-gray man in worn pants and a worn coat. He now sported a happy, satisfied little smile.

When he opened the shopping bag, much larger than usual, he almost beamed his pleasure.

"Look Abbie, a real bargain. A huge head of cabbage for only fourteen cents. And they were just putting produce out on the marked-down counter. You know, stuff that wouldn't sell and would spoil. So we have two bananas for dessert for only six cents. They're overripe, but fine for today."

Abbie carefully removed one outsized damaged leaf from the head of cabbage and cut out the core, taking as little as possible of the vegetable.

"Will we have anything with it?" she asked.

"This is best of all," Matt said, openly grinning now. "Here is a smoked pork shoulder, also on sale. We can cut off two small slices to have with our supper tonight along with some of the cabbage. Tomorrow we can have a little of it with potatoes, scalloped in the pressure cooker, along with a cabbage salad. Sunday you can bake it, special, you know. We shouldn't need any bread with suppers like that!"

Monday there would be leftovers, Abbie knew without being told.

But that she didn't mind. Monday was hers, her very own day.

"And along with the meat that's left on Monday we can have dried pea soup. See? I already have the peas. I outsmarted them on that, too. They had more expensive packages on top, but I dug to the very bottom, at the back of the counter, and I found a package from the last pricing at two cents less." His voice was triumphant.

Matt surveyed his purchases proudly while Abbie sliced off two small rounds of the pork shoulder and popped them into the pressure cooker with half of the cabbage and just the right amount of water.

Matt shrugged off his worn coat and hung it in the small closet off the kitchen. Then he turned, and enthusiastically picked up a loaf of bread, his final purchase of the day.

"This is a new kind of bread, see? It was marked down to 12 cents because it's left over from Wednesday. And look. I counted the slices, right there at the store, and there are 29. Do you realize, Abbie, that there are seven more slices than the other kind we were buying?"

Any stranger in the cozy little kitchen could have watched the loaf of bread in his graying hand with the broken nails and felt the mathematics in his mind: four for breakfast with coffee; two for Abbie for lunch; two for his lunch bucket; eight slices a day into 29— three and a half days.

"Have a good day, dear?" he asked as he was putting away his lunch bucket, having first removed the TV tube.

"As usual," Abbie replied. "Ironing and cleaning on Fridays, you know."

Matt knew perfectly well. He knew Abbie's schedule even as he knew his own.

"You have *your* day to look forward to anyway, dear."

Matt prided himself on calling his wife "dear" frequently. He never could understand "her day" though. He gave her a dollar a week to spend all by herself. He knew exactly how she budgeted most of it. She spent 40 cents on bus fare to the public library where she spent a good part of the day, and she brought back several books each week. Another 33 cents went for a package of cigarettes which she hoarded during the week, having one after each meal, skipping Monday's breakfast on "her day". Matt didn't smoke. But what about the other 27 cents? He'd always wondered but never asked. He would have been surprised to know that Abbie wondered about the amount of his pay check, too. He'd never told her. It was none of her concern.

Now he trudged up the stairs to the bedroom to change to a clean shirt before supper. This too was ritual. There was just time before the 6 o'clock newscast.

Only tonight was different.

Abbie heard the rasping sound as Matt pulled open his underwear drawer. Then she heard his rapid footsteps stumbling frantically down the stairs and into the kitchen. His hands trembled. His face was gray and blotched.

"My suitcase," he gasped. "What happened to my suitcase?"

"Why your drawer has always been crowded so I took it down to the basement," Abbie said, not glancing up. "It's near the furnace."

Matt was at the basement door in three fumbling irregular steps. He flung himself down the stairs.

A single piercing shriek echoed in the kitchen, followed by a few padded taps and a final dull thump.

Abbie Bitner stood absolutely still in the tiny kitchen as the minute hand of the clock continued on its unalterable orbit. She was shaking, but forced herself to calmness.

The pressure regulator on the cooker danced gaily and whistled. It was the only sound in the house.

Finally Abbie drew in a deep shuddering breath and went down the cellar steps, carefully skipping the space second-from-the-top.

She bent over Matt and felt his left wrist. There was no pulse. She pried open Matt's clenched right fist and extracted a key.

When she went back up the stairs she carried the suitcase and the key.

Then Abbie went to the house next door and called the police.

They checked the steps and removed the body while Abbie sat quietly at the kitchen table and methodically answered their questions.

After the police left, warning her not to leave the city, Abbie brought out her hoarded atlas, travel books and folders and studied them. Frequently she lifted her eyes to gaze fondly at the large flowered hat. Oh yes, she'd lunched luxuriously at the better hotels twice a year, but these things, the books and the hat, were her accumulated possessions of 12 years at 27 cents per week.

There was a trial. The prosecuting attorney maintained that Abbie Bitner had removed the step second-from-the-top. Didn't her travel books and folders prove that she wished to travel? And didn't the suitcase which police found in the kitchen provide the motive?

The suitcase contained over fifteen thousand dollars.

However, the letters in the insurance company files requesting replacement of the step proved the deciding point. The jury declared her innocent.

Abbie walked down the courthouse steps into bright sunshine. She lit a cigarette and took a deep satisfying puff.

IT HAD taken Rupert Green fifteen years to learn that John Crevitt, a bachelor like himself, but unlike him a miser, had concealed his savings in a crypt beneath the floor of his cottage. It was typical of him to do this because, as he knew everyone's business and how the people of Lower Tupley employed each waking hour, so his contempt for them and suspicion of their motives and impulses had grown with each passing year.

The nearest bank was in Tavistock, but mistrust, ingrained in his very fiber, made him avoid financial institutions as he would the plague. He'd have no stranger—and no erstwhile friend either—making a profit on his money. No, siree! He refused to think of the good rate they paid, only of safety—and silence. And though his nose might be poked endlessly in affairs that did not concern him, about his own finances he was religiously taciturn, so that only Rupert knew of his hoard.

It had not taken nearly that many years of supercilious patronizing and scarcely-veiled insult to bring Rupert to his decision regarding John. *He hated John Crevitt enough to kill him!*

And now the time was right.

He was very sure that he had never betrayed his hatred to anyone, least of all John, who came regularly to his sexton's cottage across the Tavistock road from the cemetery, to gossip about the villagers and smoke his pipe of an evening. Thus it came about that the two of them were considered

John Crevitt was an insufferable, tight-fisted miser . . . and a gossip to boot. Rupert looked forward to his murder with relish.

BY ROSWELL B. ROHDE

A GRAVE AFFAIR

friends, a fact which was going to make the accomplishment of Rupert's eventual revenge and gain that much easier. It became a little game with him, that of dissimulation and hypocrisy, making John feel welcome, at ease, doing his utmost without strain or apparent effort to lead the other in relaxed comradeship so that he might never know the fate which lay in store for him. It seemed a very good secret joke to Rupert, that nothing about Lower Tupley, or the valley in which it lay, escaped John, except this last, vital, fatal fact of Rupert's contempt and greed.

Of course, Rupert reflected, as he looked out of his window toward the bright sand beside the grave in which Mrs. Amsterdam's remains had today been laid to rest, he might have done away with John, even had he not followed him home one night after a game of darts at the Green Frog and seen his hoard beneath the floor. John never earned a great deal, but he worked steadily and his needs were simple, made even more meager by his soul, essentially that of a miser. Saving became a religion with him, and it pleased him mightily when Rupert gave him a meal, as he sometimes did, for it meant that a few pence more could be consigned to his savings. He was always careful never to invite Rupert to his cottage near mealtime, so the favor never had to be repaid.

After Rupert learned of John's crypt and saw, as John counted it that it was sizable, he could think of nothing else. And now the fact that he would soon be enjoying the sunshine and the women of southern France at the expense of John was a fine jest indeed.

A brief smile lit Rupert's face. John had frequently called him a fool, a shiftless, unambitious fool, with just enough venom in his words to make them sting. John would no longer live, once he learned that a fool might confound even the wise!

It would all be so simple—and no gun to be traced, no knife to be wiped clean of prints and hidden, no poison purchased at a chemist's and so arouse suspicion. And best of all—no body to tell its silent tale of violence wreaked upon it and bring the officers prying about.

"I am the grass," Rupert said aloud, liking the sound of the words. "Let me work. I cover all. . . ."

He chuckled. He was forty-five; the past had been bleak, but there were still good years ahead of him —with money. From a wastrel, a digger of graves in a remote Devon valley where the profession was still regarded with fear and suspicion, as though he were very close to the hangman and equally to be avoided, he would pass with John's money to ease and comparative luxury. Perhaps he would find a Frenchwoman to work for him and guard his treasure. Frenchwom-

en, everyone knew, were the best businesswomen in the world, saving and tight. He chuckled. But not so tight as John Crevitt!

Yes, he would find him a sweet-willed Frenchwoman, and she would work and he would loll on the sunny slopes of their vineyards.

Yes, the time was right, the pieces fit flawlessly. . . .

Although he had known for sometime that John planned a trip to London, Rupert had been doubly glad when John himself announced in the Green Frog this very afternoon that he was leaving early in the morning. He would go before daybreak, walking as far as Tavistock, since there would be little traffic on the Tupley road at that hour. Beyond Tavistock there would be so many vehicles that he should have no trouble getting a ride. Being the miser that he was, he certainly was not going to spend good money just for transportation when there were plenty of free rides going his way. So he said, and the villagers who assumed his penny-pinching ways were the result of necessity, winked and nodded and wished him God-speed.

"You'll not be back, John," Black Hardy, the landlord of the Green Frog said with a leer, "once you've tasted of the fine life of the city!"

"Aye!" Tom Bliss added. "You'll be lucky if you don't lose your guineas and your virtue, Crevitt!" Tom had lost both, long ago.

"Maybe you'll lose yourself!" Pip Cox, the village idiot put in with the occasional wisdom that falls from such lips.

John smirked at these remarks, so obviously prompted by jealousy. Rupert smiled quietly, secure in his knowledge that John wasn't going anywhere, at least not in this world, knowing that it was rather his own hour of triumph that was at hand.

John strutted and bought a round of drinks, something he was ordinarily chary of doing. For the first time in his life he was the center of attention, and he made the most of it. He was insufferable, like the cock who thought the sun had risen to hear him crow.

Until this moment, murder had been a thing Rupert knew he must do to achieve his ends. Now he developed an actual relish for it!

"Bring me back a wife, John," he said, so that the others would remember his good humor, and their mutual friendship.

"Maybe I'll find one my'self," John said. "Of course, if she's well-heeled, I'll live in Mayfair with her!"

Everyone laughed loudly, and Black Hardy set one up. It was an occasion.

It fit, Rupert thought. The conversation was perfect. The jig-saw puzzle was nearly finished.

Taking advantage of John's expansive mood, he borrowed a couple of shillings, knowing that John would be up to collect before he left, tonight in fact. He probably

would have come anyway, to say good-bye, but this was insurance of the fact.

Of course John came.

Rupert was working in the cemetery, and hailed him as he was going to the cottage. It was nearly a mile from the village and John was squeamish of burying grounds at night, but he had his loan in mind to sustain him.

Rupert had been raking and puttering around until after dark. Mrs. Amsterdam's funeral had occurred at just the right time. Of course, it could have been anyone's death, or he could have opened any recent grave without exciting suspicion. But her funeral made it perfect. She had been Lower Tupley's leading lady—wealthy and proud. Highly respectable.

John stood on the loose earth. A few damp leaves swirled from under an evergreen and blew past. The April night was dark, with scudding clouds like portents of doom.

"Came up to get my money," John said. " 'Gainst my principles to lend, but I thought, 'Well, we been friends for nigh twenty years now —he'll pay me back' ".

Rupert came up beside him, smiling.

"A friend in need, John," he said. "A shilling, wasn't it?"

"You oughtn't tipple," John corrected, "you have no head for it. Two shillings, it was."

They were his last words. Rupert hit him at the base of the skull with the side of his spade. John pitched forward promptly, like a sack of potatoes, thumping soundly on Mrs. Amsterdam's rough box. He made no outcry and never moved. Rupert slipped in on top of him and removed his cottage key from his pocket.

When he climbed out of the grave, he looked around cautiously, but he was completely alone in the darkness. No one came to the graveyard at this hour. He stuck his shovel in the loose earth and spit on his hands. He rubbed them together with satisfaction, smiling to himself. Then he went calmly to work, filling in the hole, his strokes strong and steady. After a while he rested, then continued his effort until he had made a nice plump mound.

He laid the sod back in place and covered it with flowers. Soon the grass would be green again. He felt at peace for the first time in many years; he cleaned his shovel carefully, and trudged home.

There probably wouldn't even be an inquiry made about John—at least not for a long time, and then it would be assumed that he had chosen to remain in London. If anyone asked Rupert any questions, he had but to deny knowledge of John's whereabouts. And who would ever think of looking in Mrs. Amsterdam's grave for a man supposed to be in London?

Between midnight and morning he visited John Crevitt's cottage. He

took the packed traveling case that John had ready for his early departure and brought back the money that had been concealed beneath the floor. He counted it eagerly, with relish. There was much more than he had expected!

The case he buried beneath a shrub he had loosened for that purpose, and the money he buried beneath another against the time when he would go to France and live like a king.

His rest was sweet that night, and he congratulated himself over and over on the excellence of his plan, its absolute flawlessness, and the consummate skill with which it had been carried out.

"I am the grass," he murmured in his sleep. "I cover all. . . ."

The following morning the sheriff and another man called at Rupert's cottage.

He greeted them with a patient smile; he had not expected anyone so soon, but he felt adequate. Nothing could go wrong. Absolutely nothing.

The sheriff was apologetic.

"I know this is most irregular," he said, "but Mrs. Amsterdam died from an acute gastric condition without calling a doctor. Yesterday John Crevitt—that fellow who went to London this morning—suggested she had been poisoned.

"We're positive she wasn't, but Crevitt was such a blasted gossip. Some of her relatives heard of it, and you know how they are in a case where there's money. Anyway, here's an order to exhume her remains. The coroner and I will assist you, of course. . . ."

He extended a paper which Rupert could not see because his vision blurred and there was a sharp pain near his heart. John had avenged himself, after all!

HOME FREE

BY
ROBERT
GOODNEY

The pistol had felt so familiar in his hand. Raincoat grinned a hip grin, "How about it, man?" Grady shrugged, "Why not?"

THE FIRST three minutes were perfect.

Wearing a dimestore clown's mask, Raincoat stood by one of the cashier's windows in the loan company, laughing the teahead's laugh of confidence and secret humor as he stuffed a paper bag full of bills. Behind the cashier's cage, working like a tightly wound-up doll, Danny-Danny jerked and pulled out cash drawers, flipping aside bundles of one dollar bills and giving a high bird-like whistle when he found stacks of tens and twenties and passed them out to Raincoat. Against the far wall were the four loan company employees. Grady was covering them with a forty-five, watching the front door and watching Raincoat and Danny-Danny. One sack was already filled and Raincoat was opening another when Danny-Danny goofed and pushed a bundle of ones through the cage bars. Laughing that weird little laugh, Raincoat threw the bills at Grady. "Hey, sweetheart, coffee money!"

Without looking at them, Grady stuffed the bills into his topcoat pocket and said "Quit fooling around, let's move." And that was the precise moment when the two cops walked in.

There was a slow-motion double-take by both parties. Then Raincoat said "Hey?" and laughed,

and suddenly everything moved; bullets smashed into ceiling lights, tables and walls. Raincoat was flat on his rear, clown's mask knocked off, but a comic look of astonishment still on his face as he gazed down at the two neat bulletholes in his chest and the bag of money between his knees. Danny-Danny poked his gun between the bars of the cashier's cage and fired wildly in all directions. One of the cops had ducked behind a table near the door, and Grady was moving in his direction, running, with a limp and a drag from his bad leg, and as he went over the motionless face-down body of the second cop, he thought, "That's the one I got." When he pulled the front door open, the cop behind the table whirled, stood, and, ignoring the madly firing Danny-Danny, snapped off two shots. Then Grady was on the street, running.

It was a midtown Manhattan street, and at nine-fifteen in the morning, crowded with people on their way to work. They broke out and away from Grady and he realized the forty-five was still in his right hand and his clown's mask still on his face. A woman screamed and Grady nearly put his fingers to his lips and said "It's all right lady, don't yell." Her thin feminine wail followed him as he ducked across the street, tearing the mask off and shoving one hand with the gun and mask into his pocket, running toward the subway entrance at 50th and Sixth Avenue. He went down the stairs in six strides, passing the token window, vaulting the turnstile, ignoring the cry of "Hey wait!" as he fled down to the subway platform, hand on the gun inside his pocket, nearly ready to faint from the stitch in his side. On the platform now, he saw people eye him as though he might be a bothersome drunk or one of the old bums who ride the subways during rush hours, shouting and slobbering. Panting for breath as he leaned against a platform pillar, he wondered how long it would take before a subway guard came after him for jumping the turnstile, but then the downtown D train screeched into the station and Grady pushed aboard. He sank down into a seat. The stitch was a nail in his side. He reached inside his coat to ease the pain. His hand came up sticky and red with blood. Grady moaned and closed his eyes.

Grady Smith was thirty-six years old. He was the owner of a bad knee, a government disability check that came monthly, a Purple Heart and a lack of focus to his life. The knee, the monthly check and the medal were from the Korean War; the lack of focus and direction had come after his discharge. At that time, he had refused the suggestion that he retire to a government hospital to sit out the remainder of his life watching television, sipping from the forbid-

den wine bottle under his robe, and comparing combat stories with veterans of World War I trench warfare, D-Day and Old Baldy. Instead, he enlisted in the ranks of the drifters: the ex-bouncers, servicemen, bartenders, boxers, shoeshine boys and free-lance insurance salesmen, those who dwelled in rented rooms near the downtown bus line, drinking, fighting, making love and reliving their memories until a morning arrived when they could no longer stand the thought of seeing again the same faces and streets and, with a growl of Greyhound engines, moved on to another rented room near another downtown bus line but, at least, a different sky above their heads.

Grady followed this road. He went from Denver to Dallas to Chicago and finally in 1959 wound up at land's end, New York. He moved into a room on the lower east side, found a woman named Sissie to sleep with, a bar named Emil's to drink in. He also found Raincoat and Danny-Danny.

He knew them casually from Emil's. With them, he exchanged comments about the weather, the baseball scores and the desirability of the girl doing the soap commercial on the TV set over the bar. "Wild, really wild," Raincoat would say, and Danny-Danny would stutter, "T-t-that's right, all r-r-right, Grady."

One fall afternoon Raincoat said, "Emil tells me you used to be in service, Grady."

"Who hasn't?" said Grady.

"Me," said Raincoat. "But that's not the point. You pretty good with a gun?"

"I made expert," Grady said.

"Crazy," said Raincoat. "We're going over to Jersey this afternoon and do a little target shooting. Want to come along?"

Grady thought, I haven't fired a gun in eight years. "Why not?" he told Raincoat.

Two hours later, Raincoat stopped the car on a dirt road from which neither houses nor people were visible. "This is it." A barren patch of grass half the size of a football field lay before them. Into the field Danny-Danny carried a large bushel basket of empty beer cans.

"Those are our targets," Raincoat said and turned to the back seat of the car. When he reappeared, he was holding three forty-five automatics. "Neat, huh?" he said. "My crazy brother brought them back from service. It's illegal as hell.' ' He tossed a half-open airlines bag out onto the ground. It contained loose ammunition and what looked like thirty or forty loaded clips.

"You've got enough there to fight a war," Grady told him.

"Bet you'd like that, hey man?" Raincoat said.

Danny-Danny placed six beer cans on the bushel basket twenty-five yards from the car. "That's a

long way for a forty-five," Grady said as Danny-Danny came clomping back.

"Need to b-be a marksman for t-t-that," said Danny-Danny.

Raincoat fired first, twice from the hip like a Hollywood gunman and then sighting along his arm for the last six shots. His last bullet sent one of the beer cans flying. Danny-Danny was next and he missed all eight shots. "Let's see what you can do, deadeye," Raincoat told Grady.

The smell of gunpowder and the echo of the shots were making Grady's head spin, but he brought the pistol up and fired twice. Misses. He lowered the gun and looked at Raincoat whose mouth was twisted into his idea of a hip sneer. "Go ahead, killer. Give 'em hell," said Raincoat.

Grady pulled the gun and fired once. A beer can sailed off the bushel basket and while it was still sailing, Grady squeezed off two more shots. Both hits.

"Cool," whispered Raincoat, but Grady didn't bother to look at him. He dropped the forty-five to hip level and fired three times. The last cans disappeared from the basket. "Jesus, that's j-just great, G-g-grady," said Danny-Danny.

Grady was looking at the gun in his hand and thinking, I still have it.

They spent the next hour there. Danny-Danny and Raincoat put their guns away and watched Grady. He was hitting six or seven in each clip from twenty-five yards and when Danny-Danny pushed the targets to thirty-five yards, he still hit better than half. Sticking the gun in his belt, he had them throw the beer cans as high as they could, then he whirled, drew and knocked the cans spinning. They ran out of beer cans before Grady was ready to quit and as they packed everything away, Raincoat and Danny-Danny stared at him with an odd blend of fear and admiration. Raincoat said, "I thought you might be pretty good, but nothing like this."

"You don't lose the touch," said Grady and winced as he felt the tired ache in his bad leg, the Korean leg. "You just don't lose it."

On the ride back, he thought about Korea and about the feel of the gun in his hand and told himself, It's all over now. That was a long time ago. Don't start feeling sorry for yourself.

As they entered the Lincoln Tunnel, Raincoat turned to him and began talking loudly, waving one hand and shouting out his proposition over the rumble of the traffic. He said that he wanted Grady to be the gun accompanying Danny-Danny and himself on a series of robberies. The work was easy, foolproof; it offered good money and lots of fringe benefits. As they swept out of the Tunnel into the city, Raincoat ended his shouted speech with "How about it, man?"

"That's pothead talk," said Grady.

"Sure, sweetheart. The way you handle a gun, you can reup and fight another war, huh? They'd be glad to see you again, Grady. Or if you don't dig that, you can stay in Emil's the rest of your life, muttering to your beer like the other squares. That's cool, Grady. That's real living, man. You got a talent—use it!"

"It's stupid," said Grady. "I don't even need the money."

"'Course not," said Raincoat. "It's not the money, it's the feeling, man. I dig you!" He laughed and beat the palm of one hand against the steering wheel. "I knew you were my boy, Grady, the first time I saw you and heard you talk."

"It's crazy," said Grady.

"I know, I know," chuckled Raincoat.

Seven years of being on the bum had left Grady no illusions about the law or the society it protected. They were there and if you had to, you knuckled down to them; if not, you ignored them, went your own way, minded your own business. As he thought about Raincoat's words, it suddenly occurred to him that he couldn't come up with a single reason not to go along with their plans. The idea of using his old skills in a new way was undeniably appealing.

"It's crazy," he said again, and Raincoat laughed and said, "You're on, man!"

When he left them that evening, he was in a state of euphoria, but in the long weeks that followed, Raincoat produced only more words, no action. They would sit in the back booths of Emil's while Raincoat talked about the hoods and conmen he knew and the perfect plans he was working out in his head. Grady spoke to them about guns and occasionally he mentioned the army. They listened to him with respect, but slowly the idea of why they were sitting there talking about the things they talked about began to leave Grady. He was merely speaking of subjects that interested him to friends who were interested, too. It was pleasant, it was better than looking into your beer glass and talking to yourself. Then one night Raincoat mentioned the loan company in midtown Manhattan.

When the subway train pulled into the next station, Grady got to his feet. The stitch in his side was no nail; it was a bullet wound. What if the police knew he was on this D-train and were already flooding the station, ready to board the train and take him at any cost? He saw himself cut down on the subway platform, dead with thirty slugs in him before he had a chance to raise his own gun.

The doors slid open and Grady emerged. Walking slowly, holding back the impulse to run or to clutch his injured side. He climbed the stairs to the street, 42nd and Sixth

Avenue, and walked west. First, he should change his clothes, then take care of the wound in his side, and then hide. Hide where?

He stopped on the corner of 42nd and Broadway and looked around. Ahead of him lay a long block of movie houses, hot dog stands, all-night, all-day cafeterias, army and navy surplus stores, newsstands. People crowded the sidewalk under a wash of neon rain. When the traffic light changed, Grady moved into the moving, anonymous crowd, passing a patrolling cop without blinking an eye or being blinked at. At the doorway of the first army-navy store, he turned in.

The wound in his side was now a mellow ache, like the ache in his leg on a bad day.

From a clerk in the store he selected a pair of suntans, an army shirt and an army field jacket. When he asked for a place to change, he was directed to a curtained cubicle in the back.

There, stripped to shorts and shoes, he examined the wound. The bullet had broken the skin, left a long red furrow in his side and passed out through the topcoat. It had stopped bleeding but he needed a bandage and disinfectant. He put on the suntans and shirt. From his topcoat he took the bundle of one dollar bills, the clown's mask, the forty-five and three ammunition clips. He put them into the pockets of the field jacket and zipped it all the way up. With his bloodied shirt concealed under the bundle of his topcoat and pants, he went back to the clerk and asked how much.

"Twenty fifty-eight with tax," the clerk told him and as Grady handed him the money, the clerk said, "I'll have your change in a minute. Wanna take a look at yourself in the mirror over there?"

In the mirror, he saw reflected the clothes of the Korean Grady Smith on the body of the New York Grady. But the New York Grady, unlike the Korean, had a receding hairline, flecks of gray at the temples and a puffiness, a redness to his eyes. When he moved, the limp leaped out at him from the mirror. Was that the Korean Grady or the New York Grady? Both?

"Here's your change," the clerk was saying to him. "Hey, what's the matter, pal? You look sick . . ."

"No, no, I'm all right."

"You can sit down a minute if you want to . . ."

Grady rushed outside, fear shoving at him like the wind. He had to get the wound taken care of. *Where?* He had to hide. *Where?* He reached inside the jacket pocket and gripped the forty-five; then he forced himself to walk toward the drugstore at the corner of 42nd Street and Eighth Avenue. Don't run, he told the New York Grady. You're a dead soldier if you run.

Fifteen minutes later, he was inside a stall in the washroom of one

of the movie houses on the street. He had dumped his old clothes in an alley trash can outside; shirt off, he sprinkled drugstore antiseptic powder on the wound and taped a bandage over it. As he put his jacket on, he felt abruptly dizzy and had to lean against the wall of the stall. This is stupid, he thought, you don't go into shock from a scratch like this. And, with a grim inward chuckle, I'm not used to this kind of life. It's been years since I've played games like this. Then, as quickly as it had come, the dizziness left.

For the first time, he thought of the patrolman he had shot. It had been an automatic reaction on his part, the forty-five bucking in his hand, the target slumping to the marble floor. Armed robbery was bad but a cop killer was far worse. He had read the tabloid stories of cop killers burning in the electric chair or smashed in a hail of police bullets to end face down in their own blood in a gutter, surrounded by the blue uniformed police, oblivious to the news photographers' flashbulbs popping over their motionless bodies. Cop killers are born to lose.

Forcing his mind from the images, Grady left the stall and went downstairs to watch the movie. He stayed in the theater until mid-afternoon, munching on candy bars, hand on his gun, head twisting when someone came down the aisle. Once the fear came over him again and to stop himself from bolting out of the theater, he had to close his eyes and tighten his hand over the gun. The feel of it, its smooth solidity, gave him confidence.

At three he left the theater to stand in the icy wind of 42nd Street, smelling the snow in the air, halfway expecting to hear a stranger or a cop cry, "There's Grady Smith. Get him!" But there were no shouts, no tap on his shoulder or bullets plowing into his head, only the wind driving down the block and the glow of neon around him. He crossed the street and entered another theater.

He was aware that he couldn't continue changing theaters indefinitely; he had to find a permanent hiding place. Two people in the city might be of help, Emil and Sissie; of the two, he preferred Emil. The tavern owner knew the neighborhood and was not above helping a steady customer, even one without money and on the run. This knowledge allowed Grady to relax a little. He was on his way, he was moving; as long as you moved, there was no time for fear.

Dawn was an icy wind against his face and snow drifting against store fronts on 42nd Street. Dawn was fatigue and endless cups of coffee in a cafeteria. Dawn was also newspaper stories of the storm that was sweeping the city and, further down on the page, of the

daring daylight robbery on Sixth Avenue.

Raincoat, he read, was dead. Danny-Danny was in Bellevue, in a coma under an oxygen tent, three bullets in his body and two armed policemen standing outside his door. The cop Grady had shot was dead. There was a vague description of Grady which mentioned his limp; one of the tabloid papers in response, they asserted, to the demands of an outraged citizenry, was offering a two thousand dollar reward for information leading to the capture of the bandit with the limp.

At eight o'clock Grady headed for the subway. Downtown, he came out on a Second Avenue coated with a pure white sheet of snow; he turned east toward Avenue A, trudging through the whiteness with the tenements like dirty dark walls on both sides of him. Emil's was on the corner of Fifth Street, a neon beer sign flicking in its window; the front door was locked but a light showed inside, and Grady went around to the back, down a flight of wooden stairs, and knocked on the back door.

After a moment the door opened, and there was Emil, tufts of hair spread out like white wings over his ears. His mouth opened to an O but before he could speak, Grady had pushed past him and was stamping the snow from his shoes. At last he said, "What do you want, Grady?"

"Let's have a warm beer first," Grady said.

Minutes later, seated on a bar stool with the first swallows of lukewarm beer in his stomach, Grady felt relieved. At least he was off the street where anyone who accidentally turned their head might recognize his limp.

"Cops were here last night, Grady. They were asking all kinds of questions about Raincoat and Danny-Danny. . . . you know, who their friends were and that kind of bull. I think they thought I was the brains behind the stickup."

"I need a place to hide, Emil."

". . . said you were carrying a lot of loot. Something about Raincoat tossing you some money before the cops walked in and the loan company not being sure yet how much was missing. Right?"

"Look, Emil," he said and raised his eyes. There was a poster of a dancing bear over the bar, a smiling bear with its paw held out; it reminded him of Emil.

"So what are you holding?"

"A joke," said Grady softly. "Raincoat tossed me some one dollar bills for a joke. I got about thirty bucks to my name, Emil."

"Those cops that were in here last night, they expected me to tell them who was in on the job. I guess they thought I'd shout out your name in front of a whole bar full of people." There was a pause and, in a different tone, Emil said, "The heat is on you."

"That's why I'm here. I figured you'd know some place I could hide for a while, just until things ease up a little."

"They'll be ripping this place apart if they don't find you. They'll be hauling in everybody in the city who limps. This isn't like an ordinary robbery, understand?"

"I guess it isn't."

"They pull out the stops for cop killers, Grady." He picked up a bar rag and began polishing an already spotless glass. "You're outta my league, buddy."

"Can you lend me a little to tide me over?"

"Don't have ten to round the bend," Emil said. "Maybe you better take off, kid. I got a feeling those damn cops might be back this morning."

"Let me get a little warmer."

"They change shifts along about now. I wouldn't be surprised if they were heading this way right now, storm and all. Better make tracks, Grady."

"Okay, Emil, I'm on my way."

"I'll stay right here and watch the front door in case they pull up. You bug out. I'll keep watch, buddy."

Grady walked slowly toward the back. He opened the door and the wind slapped his face, and he stepped into it to stand ankle deep in snow. There was only one door left. He ducked his head down, shoved his hands in his pockets, and limped away toward Sissie.

He had met her through Raincoat. At the time, Raincoat was peddling pot for pocket money and one night he appeared in Emil's with one of his Village customers. She was wearing the Village uniform, black stockings, long dangling earrings, full burlap skirt. Despite the carefully applied makeup, her face showed its age—over the thirty-year mark. Raincoat invited Grady to join them in a drink and when he left to make a delivery, Grady stayed on, listening to Sissie talk. Eight years ago, she had appeared in an off-Broadway play that lasted twelve performances and elicited from one critic the remark that "Sissie Stark showed a great deal of promise." Since then, Sissie had devoted her life to keeping a large scrapbook in which were pasted ten copies of that one review, a pile of resumes and some eight-year-old photos. She had recently moved into the neighborhood, she informed Grady, to escape the phoniness and crassness of the Village life and because the people on the lower east side were so real and the rents so cheap. When the neon of Emil's was switched off at four a.m., she and Grady went home together. After they had made love, she told him that she was sick and tired of the effete men in the Village and considered him far more genuine. Then she asked about his limp and when he answered "Korea" she said, "The world has tried to de-

stroy you just as it has me." Even for the free and easy sex, Grady would not ordinarily have been able to endure more than a few nights of her. Yet underneath the artiness and verbal melodrama, Sissie had a core of femininity and loyalty he liked. He stayed with her, even after she began to put pressure on him to say that he loved her, to make plans for the two of them; he parried her thrusts with, "You're my girl, aren't you? Isn't that enough?"

Now, climbing the stairs to her cold water flat, he found himself wondering about her loyalty, her love. How far would it stretch?

In the twenty-five watt dimness of the hallway, he knocked twice, lightly, and as though she had been waiting behind it, she opened the door immediately. "Jesus, oh Grady, Jesus," she said and pulled him inside and buried her face against his shoulder.

"Hey, hey now!"

"I heard about the robbery on television and then they said a man with a limp," she said. "I knew you'd come here. Why did you do it, Grady?"

"What did they say?"

"Huh?"

"What did they say on television."

She whimpered as his fingers dug into her shoulders. "Well, they showed pictures of Raincoat and the other guy, and then they said that a man with a limp had killed one of the cops and escaped." She paused for breath. "That's all they said, Grady. Last night and this morning, too."

He paced back and forth in the tiny kitchen. "That's good," he said. "Maybe they don't have my name yet. Now if Danny-Danny doesn't live and if they don't put pressure on Emil or the other rumdums in the bar . . ."

"You can hide here."

Walking to the window, he stared out at the falling snow and thought how long it had been since he'd seen snow like it. "I've got it all planned," Sissie was saying. "I've been thinking about us all night."

"Now look, Sissie," he began. "I want to stay here, but do you know what you're letting yourself in for? They want me for murder and if you help me, they're going to say that you're an accessory. I'm through if they catch me; you would be, too. You don't want to spend the next ten years of your life in jail, do you?"

She ran to him, held him. She said, "I love you, Grady. Let me help. Let me be good for something." To stop her from crying, he said, "It's all right now, it's all right" while she kept repeating, "Let me help you, I love you." They sat on the sofa for a few minutes; she discovered the bandage under his shirt and nearly went into hysterics until he assured her that this, too, was all right. Then

she got up and said she was going to fix him the best breakfast he had ever had; to the disorganized sounds of the refrigerator opening and closing, plates clattering, coffee perking, she rushed about the kitchen.

He turned the television set on and went back to the window to watch the snow drift down over streets and buildings. Seen from the window, the snow made the street look like a gap between two high hills, made the city into the country, empty, pure. The newscast on television caught his attention. The story was now a ten-second filler at the end of the newscast; there was nothing new in it except the statement that all available officers had been assigned to the case.

"How much money did you get, Grady?" Sissie asked while they were eating breakfast.

"I've got about thirty bucks."

"The television newscaster seemed to think it was a lot more," she said. "Oh, we'll manage all right, don't worry about that. But I was thinking, dreaming really, that if you had money, we could stay here a few days and then fly to Florida or the West Coast, someplace where we've never been, we could take life easy for a change. We could lie on the beach and make love and stay together always, and nothing bad could ever happen to us." As she spoke, her hand touched Grady's, and he knew that in her mind she was seeing them in a small cottage by the sea, making love whenever they felt like it, standing on the beach near the ocean, Atlantic or Pacific, and watching the sun come up. It was so simple to surrender to a dream like that. Get away from the city, start fresh, go to the mountains or the sea where the air is clean, where life is less complicated, begin again where there are no Raincoats, Danny-Dannys, Emils or cheap rented rooms, subways, crowds, killings.

Then he came back to reality, the apartment he was in, his jacket by the door, what was in the jacket, and knew that his life was just what it was, no more, no less, and that it would be complicated no matter where he went. "Better forget about all that, Sissie," he said. "We've got about forty-five bucks between us."

"I know," she said meekly. "I was only pretending."

"Don't. This isn't a play, Sissie. It's real." Thinking as he said it that even if it were the truth, it was the wrong thing to tell her.

He went in to lie on the sofa. The next few days were going to be tough but things might work out. He was sure that Emil would not remember Sissie from the one time she had been in his bar, did not know where Grady lived. But the others, the rumdums, the neighborhood shopkeepers and the street corner slouchers, had they ever noticed an arty looking girl and a

limper going into this building? If they hadn't, if his luck ran straight, maybe in a week or so, he and Sissie could gather their sad possessions together and head out of New York. And if whatever sea they reached was not impressive, if it merely stank of fish and salt and diesel oil, the sky and water colored a deadly boring blue, well then, it was a big country, and if he has to a man can go anywhere.

Sissie's voice was close to his ear. "Grady, what does it feel like to kill a man?"

"I didn't feel anything. I don't feel it now. It was automatic. He was there and I shot him."

"Are you sorry?"

"I'm sorry Raincoat is dead and Danny-Danny is going to die. I'm sorry I have to run." Fatigue lay like pennies on his eyes, but he forced them open; framed by her long soft hair, her face gazed down at his. "I'm sorry that people screw up other people and that so many things never work out the way you want them to. But do you know something else, Sissie? I feel good, I feel alive. For the first time in years, all of me feels alive." Her face showed him nothing; framed by the hair, it looked down at him, impassive. His eyes closed. In the silence of the room, with the snow falling outside, he fell into a deep sleep.

Hours later, he woke to a dark sky and Sissie sitting motionless by the window. As he rose up on the sofa, she said in a quiet, emotionless voice, "You're awake."

"I'm hungry."

"Yes."

"Anything been happening?"

"It's been snowing. I've been watching it snow all day."

"That's good," he said. With a strange sadness, he realized that she was close to collapse. In service he had seen minds break, terror send a body to huddle in a far corner of the bunker, hands over head, knees drawn up, whimpering. Often it came in a quieter way: a man alone in a foxhole, not moving a muscle, catatonic, only his eyes flicking back and forth, watching for the horror in the night. It wasn't a question of bravery or cowardice, sensitivity or insensitivity; in order to keep going you had to have a reason. Those who had none, cracked.

He knelt by her chair. "What time is it?" he said quietly.

"It's after one in the morning. You've been sleeping a long time, Grady."

"I still feel tired," he said.

"I thought you were dead, Grady. I thought you'd died on me. I sat here and imagined that the police were talking to me and I told them: I didn't rob anyone and I didn't kill anyone. All I did was love him, you can't put me in jail for that."

"They won't send you to jail."

Her hands closed cold over his.

"I don't want to go there, Grady. I can't stand the idea of being locked away. But I don't want anything to happen to you, either. I don't know what to do anymore!"

"It'll be all right."

"Even if we managed to get out of here, wherever we went, we'd be worrying about being seen. We'd always have to be moving, Grady."

To still her fears, stop her words, he laid a finger across her lips, pulled her up from the chair and led her toward the bedroom. Obediently she followed him to lie on the bed without moving. With a cold desperation, he began to make love to her, but it was inept, unsatisfying. A few minutes later, sharing a cigarette, he felt tension like a board between them. He did not touch her. Again the physical and mental fatigue pulled at his body. We can't steady other people, he thought. We can't even steady ourselves. Her body turned toward him in the bed and her mouth brushed his ear. "Grady," she said in a small voice. "This is important to me. Did you hold up that place because you wanted to get money for us?"

He knew what he should say, what she wanted him to say. But he couldn't. "No," he said. "I didn't do it for the money or because I loved you. I did it for myself."

Silence; then an intake of breath and bedsprings creaking as her body turned away from him. The least he should do now was to hold her. He didn't; instead, he lay quietly and thought, I did it for myself, repeating the words like a refrain, until his eyes closed and he slept again.

From dreams of peace and snow, he woke to dawn and an empty bed. He stared through the bedroom and the kitchen into the living room. Deserted. He pulled on his pants and shirt, laced himself into his shoes and ran to the window. The snow fell in big lazy flakes; he did not see Sissie in the street. He looked over his shoulder toward the alarm clock in the bedroom. The clock read five past seven. He walked quickly to the kitchen where his jacket was hanging and checked the pocket; the gun and the clips were still there. He turned toward the living room again and saw the note. It was written in pencil and propped against the toaster. *Grady, please wake before seven o'clock and go. I can't do what I should do for you, at seven I'll call them, I just can't . . .* She had not signed it.

He ran back into the bedroom. The clock. Seven past seven. Did she? Would she? No time to answer the questions. Run!

He pulled himself into the jacket, took the gun from the pocket, checked the clip and took the safety off. For a moment he looked wildly around the apartment, at the windows, the coffee pot, the radio, the note, the bed. Did he want a

memento? Was he looking for something to which he could say good-by? Run!

He closed the door quietly. The halls were empty and still. He went down the stairs, nerves taut. One more flight and he would be on the street. Hand on the bannister, he took the steps two at a time; his heart pounded, his hand was on the gun in his pocket.

In the hallway leading to the front door that led to the street that led to a few more minutes, he stopped. Too late. Through the glass in the door, he saw four cops climbing the stoop. His gun came out. Two of them were perfect targets, maybe all four. He sighted along the barrel. And hesitated.

Jesus, not like this, not in a dirty dim hallway. He couldn't. It wasn't automatic anymore.

He fired twice. The glass pane in the door broke and the bullets buzzed over the heads of the four cops.

Run! Bug out! The roof.

Up the stairs he went, up and around. Two flights from the ground floor, he heard the front door slam back against the wall and feet pound up the stairs after him. "Okay Smith, you're through!" one of them yelled and Grady's mouth twitched into a smile because the voice lacked conviction. He forced himself to climb faster and looked over the bannisterto see the face of one of the cops, two floors below, looking up. The cop fired once; the bullet went into the bannister two feet from Grady, a bad shot.

Two flights to the roof. For a moment his thoughts went out to Sissie. Learn to live with it, he told her. I don't blame you.

One flight left. Another bad shot smashed against the bannister; they were still two flights behind him. The apartments ended on the fifth floor, but the stairs went another flight up to the roof. As he panted up those last stairs, he prayed that the trapdoor to the roof would open easily.

It stuck. His shoulder rapped it, his fingers clawed at the handle. It stuck. Feet pounded on the stairs. Not here. Not so close to the roof, please. He went down three steps and ran at the door, pushing out, clutching at the handles until he felt them give, the weight of the snow slide away. Then the door was swinging up and out.

The sky. The grim gray morning sky.

He stood in snow. From behind him, there was a shout and a shot; he whirled and fired down into tenement dimness and the police retreated. Then his left foot fell over his right foot.

A bad shot, a lucky shot, a good hit for them, bad for him. The pain was no pain but rather a numbness in the small of his back. He lifted his face up from the snow and he crawled. In one far corner of the roof there was a large pile of bricks

left from a dismantled chimney; he made for it. The voices came again. "Okay Smith, you're through!" and he turned and fired a wild shot over the door to the roof to keep them inside.

Silence and he crawled. More silence; through his numbness and the falling snow he crawled.

The pile of bricks inched toward him. He reached out his free hand and dragged his body behind the pile. Lying on his stomach, he gasped through an open mouth, holding the pistol, pulling the clips from his pocket and placing them in the snow, forcing himself to watch the door that now seemed so far away. This is where it ends, he told himself.

Below in the streets, he heard the wail of police sirens and the sound of windows being flung up, the faces of the poor behind glass or down on the street would be looking up. Without seeing the faces, he knew them: Negro, Puerto Rican, white, the hustler and the hustled standing shoulder to shoulder as one of their own went under. Suddenly he reached into his jacket pocket, pulled out the thirty dollars and began to throw the bills over the roof. Little green crumpled balls, over the roof to the dirty streets below. They would remember him for a while at least; they would tell the story for a few months, of how on the day they got Grady Smith, it snowed dollar bills.

His eyes closed briefly. He forgot about the money and the people in the streets. He forced his lids half-open.

The jagged irregular formations of the tenement rooftops around him were half obliterated by the snow, their outlines hidden behind the curtain of whiteness; to his dimming sight, they took on the outlines of hills, gentle sloping hills, high steep hills, ridges, all coated in whiteness, like the hills of Korea so long ago, the hills of home. He had never left that land, never been wounded or crippled, never engaged in a stupid robbery and a stupider killing. His hand tightened on the gun.

An icy wind bit his body. They would come for him now as they should have years before, awkwardly running through the snow in their lumpy quilted uniforms, rifles held across their chests, running, bobbing, chattering in a foreign tongue, their eerie strange horns blowing in the distance. Through the snow of years, they came running toward him.

A snowflake closed his eyes. He waited.

It's hard to keep a secret from a real good friend.

CONFIDANT

BY BOB ANIS

PETER came to see me last night.

It was late, well after I'd come home from the studio and I was just sitting, watching the idiot box, wondering how Johnny Carson gets away with it and sipping vodka to ease the pain.

The rapping on my door was welcome. "Peter!" I exclaimed, "Good God, I'm so glad to see you!"

He returned my smile weakly, moved past me and folded himself into the one big chair in the room. He gestured toward the TV. "Must we, Jackson?"

I laughed, took time to flick the screen to darkness and handed Peter a drink. His eyes followed me to the couch.

"Jackson, old friend, how long have we been chumming it?"

"Geez, Peter, how long is it, really? Since grammar school, isn't it?"

He sighed. "A long time, Jackson, a long, long time."

"Peter?"

His eyebrows lifted in query.

"What's wrong?"

"Jackson, if you had trouble—real trouble—who would you come to?"

"Hell, who else, Peter—you!"

"That's why I'm here, Jackson." His voice, that voice known to all of America, was tired.

I straightened and peered across at him. "What is it, Peter?"

"Carla's dead, Jackson!"

"No!" I was on my feet and across the room in two long strides. "No! Oh, good Christ, Peter!"

He stared at me for a long time. Finally, he said, "Dead, Jackson, dead, dead, dead!" Watery dimness filled his eyes.

"Peter—" my heart was hammering, "how—how?"

"Murdered—strangled, Jackson, in our bedroom!"

"Oh no!"

Peter covered his eyes with his

hands. "I—I thought maybe I could stay here tonight, Jackson, It's so damn—,"

"Of course." I put my hand on his shoulder, "Anything—anything at all I can do Peter, you know that."

"I know."

I gave him my bed, told him to yell if he needed anything and then poured myself a great double vodka and stood looking out over the lights of the city . . .

. . . Carla. Lovely, vixenish, glorious Carla. I could not conceive of anyone—anyone, wishing Carla dead. Peter's wife—my friend.

I do not know quite how it started for Carla and me.

I suppose it was right after Peter's tremendous success. The greatest mimic ever to trod the American stage, the critics said.

I was eating strawberry shortcake in Lindy's that night it started, reading that Peter was a smasho hit at the Crescendo in Hollywood and feeling very happy for him.

"Hi, Jack."

"Carla!" I jumped to my feet, took her hands. "Golly, how are you, sweetie?" I pointed to the copy of Variety which had fallen to the floor. "I was just reading about your fabulous husband."

"I'd rather you'd invite his not so fabulous wife to sit down."

"Lousy choice of words," I laughed, and held a chair for her.

"You look good, Jack."

"If your husband wasn't my best friend I'd tell you how really good you look, too."

"I thank you. Does that give me license to—" she paused as if searching for words, "Jack—?"

"Yes, Carla?"

"You're the original charter member of the we-think-Peter-is-great-club, aren't you?"

"I suppose."

Her voice cooled and her face seemed to crumple a bit. "Oh, Jack, I'm so fed up—I—I—well, I've had it, that's all!"

I reached across the table, patted her hand. "Trouble, Carla?"

"Hunh! A mild bit of understatement."

"Want to talk?"

"Lord—yes!"

"Remember me—New York's favorite newscaster—be careful."

"This you won't care to make news, believe me."

"Sorry."

"Your friend, Peter, is a great success, you know."

"Yes."

"Everywhere. New York, Chicago, Las Vegas, Hollywood—everywhere but at home!"

"Carla!"

"I'm sorry, it's true!"

And so we talked and long after the last of the die-hards had left Lindy's we finally went out and caught a cruising taxi and talked some more. Coffee and scrambled eggs followed in Carla's kitchen.

There was no excuse for any-

thing else. We didn't seek any and our lips met without questions—and we both wanted it that way.

In the weeks that followed we were so discreet—never greedy—it was impossible for anyone to have known . . .

. . . And now Carla was dead! I slept off and on, somehow getting through the night, waking Peter early.

We sat with cigarettes and coffee and words did not come easily. In the end it was Peter who broke the silence.

"Carla took a lover, Jackson."

"Don't be silly, Peter. Carla loved you." How easily the lie rode my lips!

"Okay, she loved me and took a lover, too. Make it sound any better?"

I studied him across the table. Did he know? How little we know even those we hold closest. This man, my friend, Peter, who had only to listen to your voice for five minutes in order to mimic it down to its very last inflection. A talent that had made him famous and wealthy. And now, hurt, bewildered, he faced me across my breakfast table and I did not know what to say to him.

So I was thankful for the sudden authoritative rap on the door.

I opened it to face two quietly efficient-looking men. I did not have to see the leather-cased badges to identify them.

"Mr. Harkness? Jack Harkness?"

"I'm he, come in." I stepped back.

"Lt. Meecham," the taller one said, "and this is Sgt. Spiegal."

"Gentlemen."

The Lieutenant spotted Peter. "Mr. Calhoun, Lord, I'm glad we found you in time!"

Peter rose, a puzzled look on his face. "In—in time? I don't understand."

A swift glance passed between the two detectives. Lt. Meecham said, "You didn't know?"

"Know?" Peter's brows furrowed.

"That's why we rushed here as soon as we found out who murdered your wife!"

"Oh my God, you know!"

Both men nodded grimly. Suddenly the Sergeant spun, revolver in hand to face me. "Just put out your hands, Harkness!"

I fell back in horror. "You're out of your mind!" I screamed.

And then, as fast as I've ever seen it done on TV, cold cruel steel snapped on my wrists. "You're mad! Mad!"

The Lieutenant turned to Peter. "Your wife actually helped us, Mr. Calhoun. You see, whoever strangled her had to be someone she knew well. Well enough to talk to him in the bedroom. Whatever she was doing before that, she had the tape recorder going—*and she forgot to shut it off!* It's all on there,

the whole conversation with the man who killed her!"

He whipped around. "There isn't a jury member on any panel in New York who won't recognize their popular newscaster's voice on that tape, Harkness. Your voice!"

It was then that I saw the tiny smile at the corners of Peter's lips.

And I knew!

Oh, heaven above, I knew!

"Peter," I screamed, "Peter, tell them! Tell them!"

But he said nothing. He just stood there and managed somehow to look shocked. The greatest damned voice mimic in the country.

My friend—Peter!

The thirst for gold is unquenchable. Prager had it . . . so did the old man.

The Prospect

BY MILT WOODS JR.

LIKE an ancient prophet, with the hot wind plucking at his white hair and beard and the long-barreled Sharps Rifle his staff, the old man plodded along the dim mountain trail, a speck under the searing Arizona sun. Behind him death grinned.

The trail was almost indistinguishable, the work done decades before by countless Indian moccasins and Spanish boots was nearly obliterated by the erosion of time and weather, but steadily the old man traveled it, never losing his way. The decrepit pack with its thin blankets rode heavily on the old man's bent back, from his waist a water-bag dangled and jounced in tune with his shuffling step. In his gnarled hands the obsolete Sharps Rifle looked gigantic and clumsy.

Patiently the old man followed

the turning and twisting track as it crawled under the blazing sky across sand and rock. He skirted the base of towering monuments of stone that shot into arid blueness above, then turning away, dropped again into the oven of another gully. Always leading deeper into the desolation of the Superstitions. The old man followed the faint trail. Harry Prager followed the old man.

Prager cursed the tough old man then sank into the shadow of a tall cacti. He pulled off his hat, wiped at the perspiration that ran in rivulets down his face. Prager's hands fumbled with his canteen then water was running between his puffed lips and into his parched throat. It tasted tepid, stale. Cautiously, Prager allowed himself only a swallow or two then recapped the canteen. Damn that old man, he thought, how can he keep going? He must be part goat and part mountain lion from living so long in this hell-country. Prager angrily swatted at the cloud of gnats that swarmed out of nowhere to beat at his face and nostrils. The heat was suffocating, it was a heavy woolen blanket covering and smothering him. The shadow of the cacti offered no relief from the rock-reflected simmering heat in which he sweltered.

Prager got up and moved slowly to the shoulder of the hill. Removing his sweat stained hat, he peered around the shoulder and instantly his sharp eyes spotted the bent figure of the old man, still moving at the same mile-eating slow gait.

Prager cursed the old man, he cursed the lack of water, the scorching sun, the parched land, and fervently wished he were out of it. But, as the old man's figure disappeared over a crest, Prager picked up his rifle and obediently followed.

As he walked along, his feet lurching and crunching on the broken rocks that littered the trail, Prager's sharp features were intent on the direction the old man had taken. Prager's eyes ferreted carefully the ground ahead, intent on not being seen by his quarry. His palms sweated on the barrel of his weapon and from time to time he changed hands, wiping the other dry on his crusty grimy trousers. Occasionally, his thin lips twisted as he shifted the weight of the heavy belt digging into the skin of his belly, rubbing and chaffing it raw. As his fingers toyed with the bulky weight, Prager felt a sense of satisfaction at the thought of adding to the pile of yellow stuff it contained. Stupid old man, Prager mused, it's a wonder someone else hadn't followed him to his secret lode before this.

Many times the old man had come into the town of Pina with a sack of nuggets, dust and worked ore that he used for a spree and then languid rest. When the money was gone, back into the mountains the old man would head, to return

in a week or ten days with another small load. The old man was wily, he had to be to shake off the ones who had attempted to trail him to the source of his bonanza.

It was a stroke of luck that Prager was on the trail now. He congratulated himself as he thought of how the old man had stumbled into his camp the night before. Garrulous old man, couldn't help but brag as he looked around Prager's worked-out claim. And now, he probably thought Prager was still back there working the skin off his fingers to grub out another small bit of ore to be crushed and worked by hand. The old man hadn't looked back once to see if he was followed. Prager smiled. Well, the old man would pay for that now. The months that Prager had spent scraping for the gold he now had, would pay off big, just as soon as the old man led him to his hidden mine. A bullet out of nowhere, an unmarked grave, and the old man would join the others that had disappeared without a trace in the barren desolation of the Thunder Gods' Mountains.

Prager slowed as he neared the ridge, then keeping his head low, looked for the old man. There he was. Keeping up his steady pace, looking as if the sun and the terrible heat blasting down on them wasn't there at all.

"Okay, old man, keep going, keep up that putting one foot in front of the other one, you're not going to lose me," Prager muttered. He waited until he would be unseen, then slipped over the ridge and continued his pursuit.

The sun scorched the parched ground, making an oven of the rock gullys and crevices. Its heat tore at the two moving specks jerking along beneath it. The gnarled shape of the prophet moving unaware between the mountains of heaped stone, and the shadowy figure of Prager slipping along behind.

Slowly, reluctantly, the blazing sun moved into the west. Long shadows began creeping across the land, cutting it into a pattern of orange and red light and deep purple darkness.

Prager speeded up his pace as the twilight deepened. It wouldn't do to lose the old man now. Cursing through his thickened lips, he quickly closed the distance between. Spotting the old man, he drew in a quick gasp of air and ducked down. Had he been seen? Prager's breath came harsh and ached in his lungs as he looked again. No, the old man had paused for a minute before pushing on. Prager watched the old man's receding back and despair crept inside him. "How much farther is he going?" Prager asked himself. "Damn that old man, if he is leading me on a wild-goose chase . . ."

Prager waited a moment more to catch his breath. The air had started to cool, only the rocks gave off heat. Soon they would cool and

it would be freezing at these heights. Rested, Prager shouldered his pack and set quickly off for the point around which the old man had gone. There couldn't be more than a half-hour of dusk left, then it would be pitch black, impossible for a man to travel farther. Prager reached the outcropping and carefully inching around it, kept his eyes glued for sight of the old man's shuffling figure.

Prager spotted him and felt his heart sink as he realized the old man was laying out a bedroll. That meant spending the night watching, Prager thought, he couldn't take the chance of the old man slipping out during the night . . . come to think of it, maybe that was one of the ways the old man had used to shake off others. Prager felt a sense of satisfaction, he wouldn't be fooled that way.

He watched silently as the old man made a small fire and heated coffee and grub. The odor of food drifting through the sharp air struck Prager's nostrils and he felt hunger pangs in his belly. Gritting his teeth, he hunched into a comfortable position and settled to keep watch.

The old man moved slowly around his fire which soon became the only flickering bit of light in the darkness that enveloped the mountains. By the dancing gleam of its flames, Prager coull see the old man wiping out his utensils with clean sand and then, after looking out into the night once or twice to satisfy himself he was alone, the old man banked the fire to a small glow and turned to his blankets. Soon he was asleep.

Only then did Prager allow himself the luxury of moving into a more comfortable position. He found a shelved rock where he could huddle and keep the camp in view. Wrapping his coat closer around him, Prager chewed at a biscuit and raw bacon from his pack, washing it down with his last sips of water. Soon the cold began seeping into his bones. He resisted the urge to stand, stamp his numbed feet and straighten his cramped legs. He could feel them tightening and beginning to ache.

Shivering, Prager wanted to beat his arms against his body to get the blood circulating, but he couldn't afford to make the slightest noise. Gradually Prager became aware of the deathly silence that surrounded him. The usual night sounds were missing and in their place lay only stillness.

The quiet wrapped around him, settled over him and enveloped him in its heavy arms. His red-rimmed eyes, irritated by the dust and glaring sun, threatened to revolt and close of their own accord. Prager shook his head back and forth. He bit at his fingers shooting sharp pain into his lagging mind. Cold and stiff, tired and aching, Prager crouched in misery and waited for morning.

A thousand times he looked to the east seeing only darkness. Angrily he forced his mind away from the thought of approaching day and concentrated on the gold that would soon be his. The first thing, he decided, would be to get out of this damn country. Go back east, that's what he would do! There he could live like a king. Prager thought of the clothes he would buy, the warm drinks, the foods and the girls. The thought of a warm girl cuddled against him almost made him want to moan. God, his mind raved, just wait until he got this gold. Gold in dust, in nuggets, in worked and crushed ore, rich heavy chunks of it. He'd take a bath in the stuff! He'd fling it in the air and stand in its rain! Like a fever, Prager's thoughts grew wilder and wilder . . . then suddenly, he sobered to find himself standing. Like cold water drenched over him he felt the shock of almost losing it all. He'd been ready to rush down to the camp and beat the location out of the old man. But the old man would die before his secret could be beaten out of him. The close escape from his own wildness, forced Prager down on his freezing rocky perch.

The hours continued to drag by. Several times Prager's eyes would droop and he would doze, to waken with a start and feel his heart plummet until the sleeping figure of the old man swam into his sticky view. He had not noticed when the old man had thrown a few more sticks of wood on the small fire. The shock of this kept Harry wide awake for a few minutes, then he discovered his gaze beginning to wander to the east again. Angrily, he concentrated on the fire, counting slowly to a thousand and only then would he let his eyes turn to look for a light in the eastern sky. It was torture, the cold, the waiting, but he stuck it out. Prager could be a stubborn man.

The east finally turned into a pale color and Prager moved quietly from his perch. He returned to the outcropping waiting for the light to strengthen. While he watched, he stuffed more biscuit into his mouth and chewed on the bacon rinds, trying to work up saliva to wash the doughy mess down. He wished that he'd saved some water for now. Maybe the old man would cross a spring, he must need water as much as Prager did. Prager swallowed the sticky, lumpy, clay-like biscuit and gagged as it stuck to his mouth. His stomach felt so heavy he wanted to vomit. He shuddered . . . and he waited.

In a few moments, the figure in the blankets below moved. Prager drew his rifle closer to him, the steel of the barrel cold against his palm. He watched the old man getting his breakfast, moving slowly and stiffly as he worked up the fire. Shuffling around the fire, the old man gathered his roll together, moving so deliberately that Prager felt

like shouting to him. Telling him to move on! Just as the sun started to break into dazzling view, the old man shouldered his pack and moved out.

Now the old man's steps seemed faster. It was as though he were nearing the end of the trail. He led the way up out of the little canyon and crossed a narrow ridge. Within an hour, he plunged into a deeper arroyo and after traveling it for a short way, he turned into a side-shoot and disappeared between its walls.

Prager followed, certain that he was undetected and that the trail was nearing its end. As he turned into the narrow opening, Prager tensed. His foot struck against a piece of iron making a distinct clunk. He picked the piece up and examined it closely. His thoughts spun, the hammerlock from an old Spanish musket! Of course, that was what the old man had, an old Spanish mine! Maybe one of the Peralta's, or maybe even the hiding place of the Peralta Treasure. Casting the rusted piece aside, Prager impatiently began creeping up the deep-walled rut. After making several bends, it suddenly widened out to form another large canyon, looking as if the earth had been scooped aside to form it.

The floor was scattered with large boulders and clumps of cacti growing amid the rock and shallow sand. Prager spied the old man's pack by a small spring that seeped from one canyon wall. The water faintly trickled down the rock into a shallow pool which supported the green growth around it, then disappeared into the sucking sand. Prager eyed the water thirstily, but his wary mind refused to let him go near it. Stooping behind one of the rocks, he eased his pack to the ground and gingerly looked around him.

He started suddenly, then smiled as from up the canyon came the dull clink of a pick against rock. The old man had gone right to work uncovering his treasure. Prager almost chuckled out loud as he checked his rifle and started up the canyon. He wondered what it would feel like to kill a man. Little beads of sweat started running down the bridge of his nose as he thought of pulling the trigger and watching a man lurch under the impact of the bullet as it tore into him. It wasn't going to be hard to do, Prager decided. Hell, he didn't even know the old man's name, no one did. He was just the old man. Soon he would be a dead old man.

Prager worked his way carefully around the heavy boulders, placing his feet with caution on the loose ground. He felt proud and he felt happy. Soon it would be over and there would be only the last act of picking up the gold. Then get out of this country as fast as he could.

Tense with excitement, Prager worked his way forward. Not a pebble shifted under his steps, not

a whisper announced his coming. Closer he inched toward the faint sounds coming from ahead. He could almost make out what the old man was doing by the sounds of his tools.

First the clinking of the pick, then silence as the old man paused to survey his work. He probably closed up the entrance each time he left and had to reopen it, Prager reasoned. Now the clinking stopped, he must have it opened. Prager's breath came faster as he thought of the opened mine ahead. He moved softly, cutting across the canyon floor toward the side where the noise came from.

Then he saw it. A crumbling hole in the down slope of the canyon wall. It was almost covered by rock piled around it and a growth of dry cacti. If Prager hadn't known where to look, he might have passed it. The old man had reopened it, some freshly moved rocks showed where an entrance had been cleared.

Prager watched the dark opening and moved quickly to one side where he could cover it better. He leaned against a rock and carefully lowered his rifle across it, taking slow aim at the mouth of the shaft. Sweat ran down the side of his face, trickled along his neck and onto his chest. He licked his lips, nervously. His palms were wet where they grasped the rifle.

Prager brought his gaze along the rifle barrel. The sights blurred and he had to squeeze his eyelids for a minute, to bring the view into focus. Frantically he willed the old man to appear. Willed him to appear into the sunlight. Now, he thought. Now!

The thunderous boom of the old Sharps crashed through the mountains and echoed down the canyons and ravines. On and on the report rolled, being tossed back and forth until it could have been a fusillade laid down by a battery. But it was just one shot from a monstrous rifle held in the wrinkled hands of an old man.

Prager looked with amazement at the sun shining directly into his face and wondered what it was doing there. Funny, this is all wrong, he thought, I'm not supposed to be here, the old man, yeah that's it! The old man, the Prophet of the Mountain, where is he? Prager felt himself growing numb, feeling started leaving him. He felt himself retreating inch by inch from the contact with his body, more and more he was crowded into his cramped skull until at last it seemed his whole being was crouching in that darkened space, peering out into the sunblazed world through the two openings in his skull.

Silently, helplessly, Prager crouched there in the darkness, watching the face of the old man come into view and peer down at him. What kind eyes he has, Prager thought. So blue and so sorrowful. Prager wanted to say something to him, he wanted to speak, try to ex-

plain to the Patriarch-seeming face that bent over him. Explain just how it was. But even as he tried he failed and Prager felt a deep sorrow.

The old man bent over Prager. His fingers fumbled with Prager's clothing and withdrew holding the pouch-lined belt. Prager watched the old man's soft eyes inspect the pouches, then the old man leaned over him . . . and began dragging him to the yawning hole in the ground. . . . Then horror washed through Prager's mind; *he knew.*

He knew where the old man found his gold, he knew why no one had discovered it.

And even as Prager perceived, he slid toward the barren shaft and its grisly contents.

Like an ancient prophet, with the hot wind plucking at his white hair and beard and the long-barreled Sharps Rifle his staff, the old man plodded along the dim mountain trail, a speck under the searing Ari-Arizona sun. Behind him death grinned.

one way... OUT

"Please don't move that chair!" I spoke more sharply than I had intended. "Sorry, I like it there . . . in front of the window."

BY GENE JONES

After the half year of sick leave, starting this job again was like remembering something I did in a dream. It was kind of them to let me go back to my route—God knows I need money for the hospital bills—but I must admit that I never was a crack salesman to begin with and I was plagued with doubts about starting again.

The driving part isn't bad at all. I'm alone, active, doing something sensible and down to earth. Driving has always been therapeutic for me. Getting there, as a matter of fact, was the only fun I expected on this trip. Even if the buyers remembered me they might be full of uncomfortable questions about why I've been away so long. It isn't logical to be sick for seven months with something you can't openly describe and then pop right back as if nothing had ever happened. The worst parts of the illness are all I really remember, and those you can't even tell the doctor. Not in words, at least. The diagnosis and treatment were based on my actions.

I pulled into Springfield midmorning of a gloomy day, hoping to get settled in the hotel and start covering some of the big stores in the afternoon. The town was just as I remembered: gray littered streets and cold gray river and the gray winter hills surrounding.

The hotel was no more cheerful

than the rest of the town. Its big lobby with ochre stuccoed walls and fake half-timber decoration complemented the personality of the day outside. The sofas and chairs were occupied, as in all second-rate hotel lobbies in all American towns, with aged men and women who seem never to move to their rooms or out into the town, eternally waiting for some sensation, watching for some newcomer to gossip about. They were so exactly like all the others in all the hotels I had ever seen, before I was sick, that I had for a moment the sense of a recurring dream. I passed through them gingerly to the desk and filled out the register card.

"An inside room is fine," I said.

The desk clerk took the card. "We only have outside rooms, Mr. Davenant. Every one of our rooms has a view and plenty of light and air." He ran his finger down a room list. "Let's see now, I'll give you . . . Yes, eleven eighteen."

"Eleven?" I said.

"Yes, eleven eighteen."

"You have nothing on a lower floor?"

"Not right now, I'm afraid. But I'm sure you'll be comfortable there."

He coaxed me with a smile. Irritating little man. I glanced up at a wall clock behind him. It was nearly noon, too late in the day to find another hotel and get any work done in the afternoon.

"All right." I picked up the key. "If you have something on a lower floor tomorrow, please let me know."

"Yes, sir, I certainly will," he said, forcing his toothy grin.

A pudgy old bellboy in a maroon jacket took me up in the self-service elevator. I clutched at the wall of the car as we lurched upward. When I followed him into the room my first impression was one of being reached at by the figures in the wallpaper, small overbright nosegays on a gray ground, each miniature bouquet separated from its aggressive neighbors by busy, writhing garlands of tiny white leaves. Turning my attention to the room, I found I was in a narrow entry with the closet and bath on my right; past them the room widened out. The bellboy was settling my gladstone on a luggage rack before the window which faced me.

When I saw it I stopped dead.

There was nothing unusual about the window itself. It was the simple two-sash kind you pull up to open. Over it a gray-painted wooden valance, mounted slightly crooked, supported sickly-green drapes shot through with gilt threads. They were an awkward length short of the floor, prevented from hanging flat by an aging, noisy radiator under the window. I thought of an ill-dressed old woman in a let out skirt, and realized it was defensive thinking, a distraction to keep myself from looking out. But it was useless.

Through the window I saw space. Just space. No building across the street, nothing as high as the window. No color, no bricks, nothing solid, nothing at all.

The bellboy opened the closet and turned on the bathroom light. I edged a little past the bed to the right of the window and looked out. In the far distance were hills, the river, factories smoking. The closer I went the more I saw below me, far down. The whole section of the town I could see was composed of two- or three-story buildings; the hotel was the only one of such height in the area.

My knees objected to a hard pressure. I looked down and realized I was bracing against a huge overstuffed armchair whose faded gray-brown upholstery smelled of ancient dust.

"Will there be anything else, sir?"

The bellboy's voice startled me so that I pulled back suddenly from the view. Turning to him, I jammed my hand in my pocket for his tip.

"No," I muttered. "Thank you. No." I gave him the coins and he turned to go. "Wait!"

He stopped, smiling in hope of another tip, probably expecting a request for ice and a bottle. I hesitated, embarrassed.

"Yes, sir?"

"Just—Uh, just pull that chair over in front of the window for me, will you?"

He eyed me uncertainly, his smile fading. I turned away to hang up my raincoat while he moved the chair.

"How's that?" He had it squarely against the radiator.

"Fine," I said, looking up. "Thank you." He gave the chair a critical glance and me another before he left, but he made no comment.

I hung up my extra suit and washed my hands before I went down to lunch. It was easiest to avoid the window by facing it and not looking at it. With my back to it I felt a constant urge to head for the door. Finally I was ready and did so.

The afternoon was wet and unpleasant. A heavy drizzle had started by the time I finished lunch and I pushed blindly through it from one store to another, trying to reestablish relations with disinterested buyers who had mostly forgotten me. At five-forty, mildly cheered with the one or two small orders I had taken, I slogged out into it again and aimed for a bar. The sensible thing to do, I realized, was to go back to the hotel for a hot bath and some dry clothes, have dinner in my room and get a good night's sleep.

But something blocked the comfort of the thought, some sense of uncertainty. I wasn't thinking consciously of the hotel room. After killing a double scotch I decided to have dinner in that grubby little bar. The lamb chops were tough

and the vegetables canned but the place was warm and dry. I had another slow scotch, listening to familiar sounds of traffic outside and the rain on the pavement. Then I paid the bill, went out in the rain and window-shopped the few blocks back to the hotel.

Unlocking the door, I stood for a moment on the threshold of the darkened room. Something was different. I knew it before my fingers pushed up the wall switch. I closed the door firmly behind me and walked in, leaving wet prints on the worn brown carpet until I kicked off my shoes by the bed. The big chair had been moved.

A feeling of tenseness and confusion made me shiver as I looked around the room. The chair was back in its original place and on the foot of the bed were an extra blanket and two neatly folded towels. Of course: a maid had been in.

A busybody maid. They should leave a room as the guest arranges it. It's mine while I'm staying in it. I worked around between the solid wall and the chair and pushed it to the window. I was sweating; the puffing radiator made the room stifling hot. I pulled off my wet hat and coat, then the rest of my clothes, and hurried into a warm shower.

When I got comfortable in a bathrobe I experimented with the lights, turning the three lamps on and the ceiling light off. The effect was much pleasanter for a while. It could have been an attractive room. Its major flaws were the wallpaper and of course the window. To the right of the window were the luggage rack with my bag and the corner where the chair had been. On the right-hand wall were a writing table, the bed and a night table, and on the left wall a squatty dresser with its mirror. All the furniture was painted a drab putty gray. I lit a cigarette and sat down on the bed.

The ceiling light had apparently minimized the power of the wallpaper. In the lamplight it was overwhelming. The little bunches of flowers jumped out, pulling the eye from one to another tight cluster of trompe l'oeil bluebells or red poppies or yellow poppies or cornflowers, in rhythm with the endless snaking garlands of milkwhite leaves between them. I closed my eyes and they still leaped out at me. I opened a newspaper and struggled to read. I was beginning to feel groggy with that moving wall and the heat in the room.

Slowly I pulled myself off the bed and across to the right side of the chair and window. I turned the radiator valve to the "Off" mark and listened to the steam complain in the pipes, then forced myself to reach out to the window and try to pull the top panel down a little. It would not budge. The only alternative for some breathable air was to lift the bottom sash.

There was no point in hesitating

there so close to it. I grasped the catches and lifted it a few inches. It slid up easily, far too easily. The fresh air pouring in struck me sharply and I pulled back into the corner to feel the wall solid against my back and spread out fingers. Bracing myself, I walked across past the chair and switched off the lamp on the dresser. Once in bed I could reach the one on the night table and the little reading light at the head of the bed. I was very tense for a while but the fresh air finally lulled me to sleep.

In the morning the room seemed calmer, but I was tired and headachey. The bed was torn apart—I had tossed in it all night and fragments of dreams puzzled me. I hurried through a shave and dressed to go out. Cool air still raced in, rustling through the space of open window. A wind whipped raindrops against the panes. Before I went out the wallpaper flowers had begun to move again.

All day the room surrounded me. Wherever I went in the streets or stores I would stop cold at a momentary vision of the window, open a little more each time the thought recurred. The day dragged, I had no luck. The buyers I remembered were either gone or too busy to see me and I could not concentrate on what I was doing. Once I toyed with the thought of going to another hotel. It was pointless, really—I could finish my business here in another half day; the room wasn't that bad, surely I could overcome the feeling for one more night. Late in the day I started back to the hotel.

There seemed nothing to keep me away this time. Part of my consciousness had been standing before that window all day anyhow, waiting for me to come and look out, to open it and look down.

The elevator rumbled when I pushed the button for my floor, the highest floor. I imagined the car carrying me endlessly upward, the closed box humming as it pulled me up, up, up, past floor after floor, safely inside and infinitely higher than my window. When it stopped my stomach flipped with the jolt and I stepped out into the carpeted corridor. As I put my key in the lock the sense of some change in the room touched me again. I pushed the door open and peered in, trying to see the window by the light from the hall. The window was faintly lit from outside, a gaunt livid opening. Only an expanse of carpet stretched between it and me.

I pulled myself in from the door, closed it and flicked on the light. The bed was neatly made up and the small things I had left on the dresser top arranged in nice order, brush, shoehorn, comb, the prescription bottle of tranquilizers.

The big armchair had been carefully pushed back into its corner away from the window.

Suddenly I flared. It must be the

same maid: why doesn't she leave me alone? Slamming my sodden hat and coat on the bed, I grabbed up the phone from the night table, mentally outlining my complaint.

"Yes?" said the operator's voice. I was busily piling up phrases in my mind. "Hello," said the voice, "can I help you?"

"Yes," I snapped, "you can." Then the wind went out of my sails and I was thinking reasonably again. It's something I have to watch out for, anger like that. You can't make a fool of yourself over such things. People will want to know why you were sick so long.

"What's the correct time?" I asked calmly.

"Six-twenty-four, sir."

"Thanks." I eased the telephone into its cradle and lay down on the bed. It was impossible to relax. There was still an open space before that ugly window. I rolled off the bed and leaned on the writing table for a moment before slipping in between the wall and the chair to push it back to its proper place. The warmth from the radiator annoyed me as I stood on my knees near it clutching the arm of the chair. I pushed the sweat back from my eyes and reached over the back of the chair, feeling its soft solidity under my chest, to raise the window a little. The cool air caressed my forehead. I stood up too suddenly; a little vertigo made me sway. I backed up to the bed and lay down again until I was calmer, but every time I opened my eyes that hideous wallpaper leaped and writhed and made me dizzy again.

After a while I decided it was best to go out for some dinner and find a movie, or perhaps take the car out of the hotel garage and go for a drive. And it occurred to me that I could leave a note for the maid in the morning or, if I saw her trundling her cart of linens along the hall, ask her casually not to move the chair. There was some comfort in the thought.

The evening was calm enough. I avoided thinking about my dismally few sales; they made the whole trip useless. The rain started again so I didn't go for a drive, and the movie I wandered into was a bore. I left some juvenile delinquents to their own extravagant devices after a couple of reels. But I had made an attempt to get interested in them—I wholly agree with the doctor that I must concentrate on distractions like a film or a newspaper or other people as often as possible, just to get my mind off old problems. But it's easier said than done.

I felt more at ease in the street, even with the rain spattering in my face and soaking through my coat. And I felt drawn back to the room. I wanted to check it again, even though I knew there was no reason for anything to be disarranged.

It seemed to be exactly as I had left it, but it's so hard to tell with these subtly moving walls, and I

did not remember pushing the chair so far to the left that there was a space in which I could have stood at the window and looked down into the street below. I took a sleeping tablet and hurried into bed, but the window was like a startled open eye giving a twilight in the room. Turning my head away I stared in the dim light at the wall opposite. The little flower blobs thrust out their tiny gnarled fists, alternating high or low, one side or the other, as my eyes followed them among the rippling garlands of faint white leaves, until the sedative took hold and put me out.

I waked this morning to see a clear sky through the window. The rain had finished during the night. I had a couple of appointments—touchy ones, important new clients—but only a couple, and if they went well I thought of leaving by early afternoon and driving to Worcester in time for a nice early dinner. I was shaved and dressed before I realized how late it was. Not looking out the window, I went over to my bag and took out a necktie. There was a little tap at the door and a key rattled in the lock. I turned to find a small, round old biddy, carpet sweeper in hand, peering around the door.

"Sorry, thought you was out," she said.

"I'm just leaving. Come in."

"Well." She hesitated. "If it's all right."

She dropped some sheets on the bed and started the sweeper squeaking across the floor. I went to the bathroom to knot my tie. As I took my sample case from the closet I looked back at her. She was wrestling with the big armchair.

"Please don't move that!" I must have spoken more sharply than I intended. She straightened up like a shot and glowered at me.

"Sorry," I said. "I like it there—I like it in front of the window."

"If you say so." She kneed it back against the radiator where I had put it the night before.

As I went out another maid came past me into my room, nodded and excused herself and went to the one who was now stripping the bed.

"Annie," I heard her say, "y'-friend in eleven-o-two's givin' me a hard time about towels. Go take care o'her and I'll finish up for ya here."

Only when I was in the elevator did it occur to me: What if the second maid should move the chair? Perhaps I ought to go back and talk to her. The elevator stopped at the seventh floor; a woman got on and started it down before I could either get out or push the button for the top floor, so I rode all the way down, my stomach turning over with the descent. It seemed hours before we got to the lobby.

Even as the woman got out and I pushed the top button to go back up I began to think more rationally. Surely the Annie biddy would tell the other one not to move the chair.

I was late already, I certainly should not take time for this now. There wasn't even time for breakfast. At the eleventh floor I looked out into the quiet corridor. The door of my room was closed and the maid's linen cart was several rooms beyond. The elevator door slid closed and I felt the car dropping.

This morning's appointments were less successful than yesterday's. I had no idea it would be so hard to get back into the swing of selling—in the few months away I've lost my touch altogether. It's like talking to automatons, trying to sell these buyers on the qualities of my line. If it's this tough here, driving to the other towns on my route will be a total waste of time. I can't put my finger on what it is I'm doing, or not doing, that makes them look at me so patronizingly as if they were dealing with a simpleton child. On my way back to the hotel I realized it was well past noon and I was lightheaded from not having breakfast.

So here I am, the trip a total bust, my nerves on edge again, as bad as the other time. I can't go back to New York emptyhanded and if I get this same reaction in every other town on the way the consequences will be just the same as they were seven months ago, I know it. I'll go on up now to the room and maybe lie down for a while before I pack and leave. The room is a conscious thought for the first time in three hours. That proves what a lousy morning it was, doesn't it? Why does vertigo bother me in an elevator like this?

The room key is slippery from the sweat in my palm. Don't open the door, there's something—like a breath down the back of my neck—there's something wrong inside. But I have to open it.

She moved the chair.

This carpet feels like mud under my shoes. I wonder if it's worth moving the chair, it'll just get moved back to the corner again. It's so hot in here—I'll turn that damned radiator off and open the window just a little bit. It slides up so easily clear to the top before I can stop it, and there's a wind whipping at me, pulling, not blowing me back. If I turn around I know what will happen. Those idiot little flower fists will start pushing at me from all over the room. Yes. Every time I look at one to make it stay still there are others on every side that start thrusting toward me. The door is too far away. I can just sit here on the window sill for a while and the wind will cool me, I can look down and not see the wallpaper moving at all.

I can read the traffic sign painted white on black pavement, even the headline on that scrap of newspaper in the gutter—my distance vision has always been exceptional—I can make out the seam-stitches

on that convertible top. If I only throw my left leg over and catch my right foot there under the radiator and hold the window frame with a hand on either side, then I won't slip for a while. Not until the flowers start punching harder, which they only do when I look at them over my shoulder.

Oh, that wind, so soft on my face, not cold at all. Why did you move the chair?

At best, it was a sweating nerve-wracking week on campus. For Eric there was an added note of madness.

FINAL RECKONING

BY PAT COLLINS

It was almost that time of year again; the time of the exodus. The macabre flight of depressed, frustrated human moths who flock to college campuses in a frantic attempt to recapture a bit of the carefree frivolity of college days long covered with the spider's dusty strands. It was snatched pleasure: the long-sought vacation squeezed into twilight hours and weekend idylls, the secret glimpses of mysterious pale circles on sunburned hands. Madness.

For the "immigrants", it would be a summer of recaptured pseudo-youth, revels, and reestablishments of long-forgotten friendships; for those of us already there, it was the week of final exams. I, Eric Beach, was one of those undergrads, one of those thousands who welcomed the end with aching heads and red-streaked eyes.

The wind sifted through the screened windows of my room, cooling the heavy air as I tried vainly to concentrate on the words in the books and not on the rivulets of sweat running from my armpits. I was naked to the waist and the heat caressed my body with heavy, matronly arms. The glarish reading lamp magnified the oppressiveness and my wet fingers blotted the pages of my book.

As far as I was concerned, it was the hottest May on record in Florida, and as usual, in this college town, black-grey clouds gathered over the dormitories to the west. Almost every light in the entire college was burning, and here, in the city, some two blocks away from the college proper, I followed the pattern of some millions of students all over the country: preparing for the finals.

I heard the phone jangle in the upstairs hall. Once. Twice. Someone answered. I detected muffled voices, and then from downstairs called a feminine voice, "Eric, long distance."

Before I had taken eight steps a million thoughts raced through my mind. Was something wrong at home? My mother—? I picked up the phone with shaking, sweating hands, and the nightmare started. Softly, as eerily metallic as an old phonograph recording, I heard a strangely familiar voice on the other end. "Eric? Boy, You better say ya prayers, y'hear? I'm leavin' home now with a pair of pearl-handled .45's, and I'm gonna blow yoah brains out. Y'hear me, boy? I'm gonna kill you. Be there when I get there and you'll be dead 'fore mornin' ". Then the click.

I looked at the phone stupidly. I banged on the connection. It was dead. I had to laugh. Somebody was playing a practical joke. Yes, it was a joke. I giggled, and moved back to my room. A voice called out from downstairs, "Eric, how about a cup of coffee or maybe some lemonade? Can't get it all in one night."

I heard the girlish laugh and smiled to myself. Mrs. Carey. She was one of three sisters, two of whom lived at the house the year round. One, Mrs. Hendrix, was a visitor during vacation days and summers. She was here now enrolling in the summer session which was to start next week. The sisters were all in their late thirties or early forties, and treated me with complete abandon. I was just like one of the family: I had the run of the house and usually sat in on the beer guzzling gabsessions on the weekends.

I slipped into a shirt and went downstairs.

The sisters were at the dining room table, exchanging gossip over cold beer, a custom they usually concluded at ten or eleven on the weekends. Of the three, Mrs. Carey was the oldest, but the most vivacious. She was a tiny thing, almost five feet tall, full of life and bounce. It wasn't hard to guess that she was quite a heartbreaker in her younger days. The other two, Mrs. Lola Rowe, and Mrs. Sally Hendrix, the youngest, were handsome women.

Ned Rowe pushed a frosted can towards me when I sat down. Mrs. Carey propped her chin in her hands and cocked a thin eyebrow at me. "Girlfriend can't wait, eh?" she laughed.

I shook my head. "Some practical joker. Probably the guys in the chem lab. Happens all the time: that stuff starts driving them nuts and they make anonymous phone calls to break the monotony. This one was a lulu: somebody promised to kill me."

Everyone laughed. It was funny, wildly funny.

It was cooler downstairs, and the beer really tasted good. We talked about football, baseball—the Dodgers in particular—TV, instructors, and classes. It was like being with your own family on a pleasant Saturday afternoon. Tonight was just a little different: they were waiting up for Mrs. Hendrix's husband who was driving down from Georgia.

After four or five cans of beer, I headed back upstairs. I was ready to rip those books apart!

A stiff breeze pushed from the west and golf-ball sized raindrops splattered outside my window. I felt good and tackled the books again. The phone rang again, and Ned called this time for me to get it. I cursed. Those guys in the lab must be laughing themselves sick. I jerked the phone up and that same metallic sound buzzed in my ear.

And the same voice.

"You ain't gone yet, boy? You better be gone by the time I get there. I'm callin' from a place about fifty miles away, and I'm comin' like a gunfighter. You're gonna be a dead wife-stealer."

Wife stealer? I growled into the mouthpiece, "All right, buddy, cut it. It just stopped being funny!"

My answer was a loud guffaw. I recognized that laugh. It scared me.

"Funny? Harh! No, Eric, boy, it ain't funny. This is for real. The gunfighter is comin' to town, his guns a-blazin'. You know who this is, don'tcha? This is Max Hendrix—the husband of the wife you're stealin'. Max Hendrix, the gunfighter—Haw-haw-Hahoooooeeee!!" He killed the connection.

Max Hendrix, Mrs. Hendrix's husband. I knew Max: he was a big man, a big, crude overgrown kid who was a nut about every horse-dung and gunsmoke epic that flashed on TV. He was principal of a school in southern Georgia, and he took a sadistic joy in wearing his .45's to school and demonstrating his fast draw. He laughingly swore he had no discipline problems. He worshipped Wild Bill and claimed that his guns were exact replicas of the ones Hickok wore. Yeah, he was a nut.

Sally Hendrix had been in town for only two days. She came to register for the summer session. Of the three sisters, I must confess that she would have excited a man the least. She was in her late thirties, and what must have been at one time a decent figure was now bulging and sagging in the wrong places. Mousey-colored hair did nothing for her looks either, and a placid, almost jello-like personality fitted

in perfectly with the woman she was: a high school librarian.

I held the phone in my hand and sagged into the wicker-seat chair by the table. He was nuts! With more than 2,000 available, willing and able girls—about 1998 of whom were better romantic prospects than any married woman I knew—anyone would have to be crazy-jealous to think. . . . Anyone, hell! Max Hendrix was a psycho!

I heard the giggling downstairs and decided not to tell anyone. Not now. That family was close, happy; and to blurt out that I was being accused of being Sally's lover. . . .

As weird as the circumstances were, and as remote the chances that the phone call was real, I was scared. I was no green frosh; I had known and lived with fear, courted it, slept with it. Fear had been my constant companion for eleven months and 17 days of an eighteen-month tour of duty when I had sweated and frozen between Pusan and Pyongyang, Korea, shuttling back and forth over that baked muddy hellhole until I got to know every rise and indentation in my sleep. There was a reason for fear then: that was a war. I had a weapon, an enemy, and I knew my enemy and hunted him. We hunted each other, found each other, killed each other. It was pure and simple: no passion, no hate, just I-kill-you-so-I-can-live. . . . sorry, please. But this, not knowing when, or why, it just didn't make sense.

I went back to my room and locked the door, and propped a chair against the doorknob. The only thing I had resembling a weapon was a man's umbrella with its heavy oak handle. And my hands. The army taught me how to use my hands.

I placed the umbrella by my bed and lit a cigarette. It was impossible to try to study: my eyes wouldn't stay on the line, and every car that sloshed over the rain-slicked blacktop outside sent excited tremors dancing from my stomach.

Wife stealer?

The words echoed through my mind as I sat in the darkened room, my nerves keyed. I had been a lot of things since I came to college, but my one code of social conduct —of sexual conduct—was to leave the married gals alone. I found out early that the married ones were murder. Hendrix didn't know that. He didn't know that three-fourths of the gals on campus were husband hunting. He didn't know how easy it was to meet a gal and inside of an hour to list her name in your book as one of the hunters. It was too easy, much too easy.

It grew darker and the rain beat down steadily. I peered out of my darkened window, my hands cradling the umbrella, and watched the water cascade down the hill. Errant lights were still burning on the peaceful campus, but for the most part, it was dark. Asleep. Exams tomorrow.

Somehow I dozed. The screeching of rubber against wet, resisting asphalt awakened me and I bolted upright. I listened, the throb in my throat swelling. I glanced at the luminous dials on my watch's face: 12:08. A door slammed and excited voices filtered up through the old floors, and I heard shuffling noises. Then it grew quiet, and except for a few loud "No" 's, the voices were subdued and controlled. Later, I heard two pair of feet on the stairway. One pair was *big*. I gripped the umbrella as the steps headed to my door and stopped.

In the dark my hands oozed water. I moved away from the door, out of a possible line-of-fire. An impassioned voice called out, "Eric!"

I said nothing. A knock. Not wild or demanding, but the timid knock one could expect from a stranger.

"Eric, boy, I wanta talk to you," the voice called through the door. I heard his feet shuffle nervously.

"Talk," I answered, almost in a whisper.

"Can I come in?" It was a plea. I was shocked. I had never heard him beg for anything since I'd known him. What brought this change? This wasn't the man I knew, the man who called me earlier. My hand wavered over the knob, but fear tipped the scales. I said again: "Talk."

"Look, boy, I'm sorry. I—I guess I got excited and jealous over nothing. You know how it is. It—ha-ha—it was sorta silly, wasn't it? Well, I apologize, y'hear? I'm sorry." It sounded funny, almost as if the voice were choking on its own tears. And this was the same man I'd seen bend a jack handle, showing off. There was not a soft cell in his body. I stood in the darkness and answered simply, "Okay."

"Have a drink with me?" the voice asked.

"No," I answered. "Exams tomorrow; I'm hitting the sack."

I heard the feet that carried more than two-hundred and twenty pounds shuffle away down the stairs. A tiny, ashamed voice called, "Eric, may I come in?"

I waited until I was sure the man's feet were well down the staircase, and I opened the door. The light was still off, but in a stream of light from the street, I could see tiny Mrs. Carey. I sat on the bed; she, in the room's single chair.

"What is this all about?" she asked worriedly.

I felt awkward. How can a man tell a woman that her brother-in-law accused him of being his wife's lover? I watched her in the darkness, watched the concern and anxiety. I fumbled for the words. "It-it's some kind of misunderstanding. He—Hendrix—believes I'm seeing his wife."

I saw her stiffen in the chair. I could almost see the crimson spreading over her face. "Then it was he who called?" she asked.

I nodded, then thought how silly it was nodding in the dark and spoke out. "Yes. Look, Mrs. Carey, if it's necessary, I'll go up to the campus and bunk with a friend until this blows over. He didn't sound as if he was convinced."

She faked a laugh, trying to be light. "No. Don't you dare. He's just tired. Overwork. I—well, I'll let him tell you tomorrow after he's had a good night's rest. Don't worry about anything. Goodnight."

I don't know how I did it, but after I closed the door after her—and braced the chair against the knob—I slept. Maybe I was emotionally exhausted. Maybe—anyway, I slept.

My first exam was at ten. I awoke at eight, showered, and dressed. The morning was sparkling: one of those green, bright spring days that are made for the beaches and white sand. I heard movements in the front of the house, and I could hear Hendrix's deep voice. He sounded like his old gruff self this morning. Jittery, I grabbed a notepad and a couple of books and headed down the stairs. It was agonizingly quiet. Every step was heading into a crazy world which might explode in my face any minute.

Hendrix was sitting on the porch. Black hair curled over the neckline of the nightmarish sport shirt he wore. As I stepped onto the porch, he swung around and stood up. He smiled; I didn't. Mrs. Hendrix looked down.

"Er, Eric, old boy, I'd like to talk to ya," he boomed, over-friendly. The voice was not demanding. It was controlled, covered with too much ice and syrup; he had control of himself. I looked at my watch. "Can we make it later? I've got to grab breakfast and get to class by ten."

He was overly gracious, but I trusted him as far as I could throw a truck. His eyes were lined heavily with red, and dark pouches bloated his face. I glanced at Mrs. Hendrix, and saw her mouth form the soundless words, "I'm sorry."

By exam time I had all but shoved the incident behind the section reserved for English History. Utter and complete concentration had taken over and the one thing on my mind was a lot of facts concerning the English social revolution. Surprisingly, it was a snap. Much to my own horror, I breezed through it, well under the allotted time, and then, it was back to the house.

I wanted the silly mess over with as soon as was possible. I wound my way through a park area, and the greens and their various shades and tones gave a coolness and freshness I hadn't noticed before.

Max was seated on the porch, alone. I perched on the bannister, watching him closely. He began talking, and at once I knew all was not right; his voice was an almost incoherent babble, a tangled stream of words and thoughts that didn't make sense.

"It's all a coincidence," he started. "Things ain't goin' too well. And things she said and didn't say when she left home las' week. I'm old and she's young . . . a young, good lookin' woman, and me, I'm an old man. Old, not like I used to be . . . tired most of the time. She didn't say it was you, but she said she was goin' to a young lover, one she didn't have to wait up nights for. I—I put two and two together. . . ." He trailed off. I looked at him tearing himself to pieces, and wondered how in hell he came up with my number.

"Look, Hendrix," I argued, not able to control my anger. "I have, I have had, and I surely will have—no intention of fooling around with any married woman, and that goes triple for Mrs. Hendrix. There are too many good-looking *single* girls on campus for that." I had intended it to hurt; it didn't. I don't think he even heard me.

"Sure," he nodded, his huge chest heaving. "But what happens if she picked *you*? A man's a man, no matter what he thinks. I don't know one who would turn something down that wuz offered him on a silver platter, no conditions asked. It wouldn't be so bad if there wuz a bedroom or two downstairs, but all of them are upstairs, within ten or twelve steps of each other. You wouldn't even hafta go to her . . . she could come to you . . . just open the door, take a few steps, and . . ."

His eyes were shining hotly, and his hands twitching. It was horrible. I saw it as the dissection of a human with all of his fears and jealousies pouring from him. I shouted at him. "For Pete's sake, Hendrix. I'm 24, and she's almost forty!"

He laughed at me, spittle dribbling from the corners of his mouth. "I know. I was young myself. I know . . . Didn't care. Anything, anytime, anywhere. Yeah, boy, anything. You're a man; you're young, goodlookin', sharp dresser. They talk about you alla time, alla time, how sharp and goodlookin' you are, about all the girls you have. A woman's funny; maybe she wants to find out. Maybe she did find out. . . ."

I watched for it; the breaking point. I noticed the pitch of his heavy voice rise, and he was almost screaming. I had watched his hands, twitching, and my hands inched towards a heavy clay flower pot on the bannister.

The clay pot felt good in my fingers. It would be silly to run; I had let myself in too far. I had gambled, wildly, and placed all cards on the table, face up. I was going in against a pat hand.

When I saw his hand dip between the cushions, I threw the pot in a wide sweeping motion. The pot shattered against his head just as his hand cleared the cushions, and I caught a glimpse of a shiny metal object I knew had to be

there. I was moving away from him, ducking frantically as his body arched up, almost meeting the pot, and his senseless eyes rolled back in his head as he lurched up and over the bannister. Dirt and clay showered me as I scrambled on the floor, watching him thud in the yard. He lay still, an ugly slash on his cheek, high to the hair line.

I was shaking. Shaking with the old maddening tremors I had all but forgotten. My knees wouldn't hold me up; everything had lost its color, and was startlingly vivid in its eerie black and white. I fumbled for the gun, a heavy, pearl-handled .45 revolver, broke it open and emptied the cylinders. I felt under the other cushion for its twin.

I reeled into the house, phoned Mrs. Carey on campus. Mrs. Hendrix flew from upstairs, gave a shriek when she saw the guns in my hands and passed out. I was too tired and too drained to give a damn. I sat down and continued shaking.

Soon, Mrs. Carey and the police were at the house. Mrs. Hendrix was put under sedation and Max was carried to the hospital. I muttered, "He was crazy. Wild crazy. I'm sorry, Mrs. Carey. As soon as I finish my exams, two more days, I'll leave. I—I'll write about my plans for next year. I—How did he get that crazy idea?"

She placed a small, warm hand on my wrist and smiled. "He'll be all right. Don't worry about a thing. But, Eric . . .", she paused, and looking into her eyes, I knew for the first time what the whole cockeyed thing was really about. She spoke, but what she said was anticlimatic, like throwing a punch when your opponent's out cold. She looked deeply at me, a sad smile on her face. "He did have a reason," she explained. "In a few days he probably would have been right."

"Drink up, baby, we're on a holiday."

LIBERTY

BY TOM O'MALLEY

TWENTY MINUTES. Take them one by one.

I had only twenty minutes to do it: to end it once and for all. Do it to her and somehow dispose of the body.

Twenty minutes.

Hardly enough time to cram in all the hatred and remembered small mean things and the big fights and the no future, no past and the years of thinking about it.

Better to think instead about jockeying the car into the right lane, past the ferry slip, over the ruffled iron flooring and onto the scowlike barge. I had maneuvered into the middle lane so I would be certain that my car was dead center on the boat. The dead center. Deep in the heart of the ship's bowels surrounded by empty automobiles, left idle while their drivers and passengers went to feel the salt spray thread across their faces and to see in the near waters the Statue of Liberty casting a lime green reflection. I would have liked to wave to the old lady but my own torch needed tending and my own liberty

was thudding in my chest like a lump of jellied fear.

How to do it to her? She lay sprawled on the plastic covered seat, her mouth a little open, breathing the thick-fumed shallow breaths that mark a sleeping drunk. I'd encouraged her in that all afternoon.

"Drink up, baby, we're on a holiday."

"You're not drinking?"

"I'm coasting. I have to drive back to the city and traffic looks as though it might be heavy."

"Well, drive careful. We only borrowed the car, you know. It's not like if you smashed it up, it's ours." She inhaled another third of the beer in her glass. "Maybe I should have a shot. My stomach's sort of nervous."

I almost said it but I bit back words. The same words to the same nervous stomach from California to Chicago and now to Staten Island, New York. I didn't say, "If you'd stop drinking so much, your stomach wouldn't be so nervous." No, not this afternoon.

"Sure, why not? We're on vacation."

I counted out some more change and put the balance in my pocket.

Her tone got peevish and half-whining the way it always did when I'd violated what she thought was the proper behavior in a saloon.

"Do you have to put the money away? I know you like a book, Jacko. That's your sweet way of saying if I should happen to want another drink I shouldn't have it. And even if I don't choose to have another, aren't you leaving a tip for the bartender?"

I only half heard what she said. I'd heard it or something like it so often from her, I could blank out the listening and think of something else. Today, it was the borrowed car. She didn't know it but the Ford was really borrowed without permission from someone I'd never seen. That was the one chance I'd had to take. Stealing the Ford.

I could see the car through the side window in the bar. Dark blue, four door sedan, the 1953 model, paint worn a little and one window on the left side cracked down the middle. I kept the windows rolled all the way down on the trip from the city, across on the ferry, and I wouldn't roll them up again until I got in the center lane on the ferry trip back.

I had to do it on the trip back to Manhattan. Even there I had to plan. Just walk off the ferry as though I didn't have a car and disappear into the crowd.

The afternoon was a long one but I didn't care. I was watching her get drunk for the last time. There had been so many times, I'd almost forgotten when the first time was.

She always drank fairly heavily and at first I had enjoyed it but gradually it became a methodical

business with her. A quick three or four in the morning to help the tightness in her chest. Otherwise, she threw up. No breakfast. Not even coffee because that upset her stomach too.

I have to laugh about that. She had—she has a cast iron stomach. Anything less and the liquor would have killed her long ago instead of me planning to do it this afternoon in a slightly borrowed car.

"Will you please pay attention to me?"

It jarred me. Like always. That shrill half yell that made even the bartender look up expecting a brawl.

"What, hon?"

"You've got that stupid look on your face that means you're thinking again. You've been thinking a lot lately, haven't you?"

Careful.

"No more than usual."

"Well, it better be about how to get a little more money. We're running low." Her voice raised a calloused octave. "Bartender."

He came over slowly, drying his hands.

"I'll have another beer." She hesitated a second. "And a shot. That last one helped. It's not as tight here anymore." She patted her chest. "How about you?"

I shook my head.

She smiled. "Just the one, bartender, and don't forget the shot. And make it a good one, this time."

I was prepared to make this time better than good. In fact, it had to be perfect. For whatever years ahead of me there might be, I was determined that they would be all mine and not one more day of them shared with her.

A funny way to end it. With her and without her. I didn't need her cooperation or help or approval. I didn't have to worry about her losing the job for me or breaking up the house or spiting me, or complaining about a better living. There wouldn't be any living for her. Only for me.

She stirred in her sleep, pushing a straggling lock of brown hair from where it hung near her open mouth.

Please don't let her wake up. She never wakes up this soon. Let the ferry pull away from the dock and all the cars empty before she wakes up.

I leaned across her carefully and rolled the window up. The glass with the jagged crack. It was unwashed and in the glass I could see her reflection.

Short, squeezed into a loose ball, with folds of fat puckering under the sheer black dress. The top button left open. At first, to show the swell of her breasts; lately from laziness. She had long since stopped grooming herself and I was fairly sure that the zipper on the back of her dress would be half undone.

I told her one night that she'd

made the complete circle. From pretty to pretty awful. And so easily. That was just one more thing she held against me. I learned not to say anything truthful to her or to cross her in any way. She'd wait until there was something I wanted or I was in a job I liked and then she'd ruin it for me. Every time she did, I could always see back in her eyes that remembering of what I'd done that she was paying me back for and double.

I wonder how she would pay me back if she woke up right now? If she opened her eyes, blinking the red veins into place and saw in my eyes that I was going to kill her? Would she scream? I hope she doesn't scream. It's been too hard to build myself up to this, too long to think and plan and too little time. To actually do it.

A shiver of excitement ran underneath the Ford with a delicate palsied shudder. The ferry had cast off its mooring and was sliding away from Staten Island headed back across the bay to Manhattan. I sat quietly, feeling the boat surge to life beneath me.

Quietly, watching my hands.

They were twisting and stretching, dancing a nervous waltz with each other. Hands that shortly would fit around her plump neck like a choker of inexpensive pearls.

Fit and tighten until her pink tongue licked the bloodless lips into a white moist gasp. Tighten until her eyes widen and she dies.

My hands are shaking so badly. I must be afraid. Me, who can't even step on a bug, planning to murder her. Not murder. Stick with the way I want to think. Don't put it into words. I'm just going to do it. Very simple and not touching any emotions. Just do it and have it over.

Kill her on the Staten Island ferry in the twenty minutes it takes to sail from the Island to the lower Manhattan terminal in the Battery.

My hands moved toward her neck clenching and unfolding.

For a second, I thought she was awake. Her eyes were still closed, the lashes fanning in shallow arcs against her flushed cheeks. Still, I felt spied upon, as if everything I did and felt and thought were being carefully watched.

Then I saw him. Hanging on the outside of the Ford, his nose pressed on the rim of the window like a gremlin.

"Get out of here.", I shouted, forgetting that I might wake her.

He didn't move. His eyes were round and unblinking as they stared into mine. Round, protruding black eyes boring a hole through me, never shifting or faltering.

The head came up slowly and I heaved a sigh of relief. It was just a kid. Ten or eleven at the most, wearing a dirty striped jersey.

"What are you doing to the lady?" He smeared a grimy fist across a runny nose.

I got angry so fast, I didn't know where it came from.

"What do you mean, what am I doing? I'm minding my own business, that's what I'm doing. Now-get out of here."

I reached across the back of the seat at him, ready to smash that inquisitive, knowing little face when he started running.

He ran like a football player in a broken field, dodging and weaving through the parked cars. I leaned out the window and saw him emerge from the dark coolness into the sunlight of the lower deck. He ran up to a woman leaning on the deckrail and pulled at her.

The woman turned slowly, listening to him, and looked back at the row of parked cars, then with a sudden automatic swipe, she hit him. Whatever he'd said, she hadn't believed him. Maybe, she thought he was being nosey or just annoying people the way kids do.

The last I saw of her was a thick tanned arm grabbing him by a bunched fold of striped jersey and hauling him across the deck to the railing to look over the s[illegible].

Three minutes. Barely clear of the ferry slip. The height of the enormous wooden pilings lining the ship's entranceway receded slowly and I felt myself withdrawing from a walled in canyon out into the open sea.

Three minutes and I felt like a millionaire with seventeen minutes to burn. Seventeen minutes and she was still asleep. She could always sleep. I'd watched her sleeping often enough that I shouldn't be surprised the way she looked so young. Most people don't look as hard or rotten when they're sleeping.

Right now, she looked like a kid with one hand balled up into a fist and propped under her chin. The other hand was still hanging onto the souvenir gold statue of Liberty, the way kids will take a favorite toy to bed with them.

Not real gold, but one of those gilded replicas they sell in the terminal on the Island. When I bought it for her, I laughed out loud. Actually, the only time I really laughed all day or for a lot of days for that matter. Of course, I couldn't tell her why. I just laughed it away.

She wasn't happy with the little tin statues. They were too fragile, she said. She wanted something that would last, maybe even longer than she would. That's when I laughed. How could she possibly know that even one of the little tin statues would last that long. Just for a twenty minute ferry ride. I bought her the iron one anyway. It wasn't that much more expensive and she carried it with her all afternoon. The only time she let go of it was to prop it on the bar while we were having beer. I would have bought her anything she wanted. The statue was really a going away present only she didn't know it.

She still clutched it, the golden crowned head resting against her breast, the upraised torch pointing toward her heart. Sound asleep.

Another circle. Asleep now and asleep when I met her. Four years ago.

I almost tripped over her. She lay so tiny and still on the bright green beach towel and my eyes were blurred with saltwater.

"Well, hello." It was like finding a lost billfold in the dark. She was young and pretty in a sleepy eyed way. Her bathing suit was old but tight fitting and her breasts jutted up at me through the taut blue jersey.

"Hello." She smiled and there was no resentment in her voice. She sounded almost pleased to have been wakened with a shower of sand and salt water.

"Did I get you wet? I'm sorry."

"No, I'm fine. I'm always fine. It was time I woke up anyway. I was getting too much color on this side." She shifted and rolled over, her buttocks arching and then easing into the sandy depression.

I felt a hot quickness in my stomach, running like spilled coffee inside my thighs. She was pretty but there was more than that. She had something that made me want to touch and hold her. I held the thought in check, afraid it would show on my face. She tilted her head sideways until our eyes met directly.

"Living on the beach?"

I knelt down beside her.

"I'm thinking about it."

"Here, share my towel." She moved over on the outsized beach towel and I slid onto it, next to her. My elbow brushing her shoulder, my knee rubbing against the thin fabric that rounded over her hip.

"The beach is the only place to live. For me, it makes living. In the daytime, I have to have sun, all the sun in the world."

I whispered cautiously, not wanting to push it too far but wanting to find out how far I could go.

"That's all right for the daytime but in the night time. . . ."

"The night time is for other things." She looked at me levelly. It was my eyes that dropped first.

"My name's Gloria. What's yours?"

"Jack."

I moved on the beach towel not looking at her, just feeling my leg stretch out alongside hers. The small fire in my stomach spilled and spread until it seemed she must feel it burning against her skin.

Raising herself up on one elbow, facing me, she turned suddenly.

"Want to go into the water, Jack?" Her mouth was red and wide in a cool amused smile.

"Do you want to?"

"Make me." She half swayed toward me. I swallowed.

"Make you go into the water?"

"If that's what you want?"

I moved imperceptibly and my

mouth covered hers. She lay back on the beach towel and I moved with her as if we had rehearsed it many times. Her lips pressed against mine and her breasts swelled and widened under my chest while her fingernails made spidery tracings down my back.

The sun rose steadily above us, but we lay twisted together like crullers baking in a wide sandy oven. It was that simple. Everything was simple and direct with Gloria.

It was my night off and we went dancing. Drinking later. Her room still later. Everyone we met liked her. I was surprised. I had never known anyone so full of life, always moving and laughing, reaching into life and wanted by everyone who met her.

She found a little apartment on the beach. In Venice, California. As automatically, she moved into it with all her belongings, crowding me a little but I was happy about it. She dropped things as she went and they stayed there. One stocking over my trousers in the closet. A wet pair of walking shorts that hung on the shower rod for weeks, drying and becoming wet again each time we used the shower. I mentioned the shorts to her one afternoon after they had fallen into the stall while I was soaping myself. She only laughed.

"They were so dirty, they need lots of washing. Like your mind does when we're in bed." She stepped into the shower, moving up against me and the walking shorts stayed hanging on the rod.

I don't know when I became jealous of her. Suddenly, there it was. She would be talking, laughing with a group of people, tilting her head in that certain way to emphasize a point and waiting for the laughter that always came in a roar. And I was jealous. I wanted her to tilt her head for me and no one else. See the wide innocent smile deepen into almost uncontrollable laughter just for me.

Somehow, we stopped going out, stopping at our favorite beach bar, meeting people. I would finish at the restaurant each night about ten and pick up a bottle on my way home. Even that was a change. I took the car instead of letting Gloria drive me to the Pines and then pick me up after the last dinner was served. In a way, it was sensible because it was a long drive. Also, I never knew when the last of the dinner crowd would leave and usually Gloria had to wait for me at the bar in the lounge.

Sometimes, she sat at the piano bar and sang in a true small voice that caught the ear and made the other customers listen closely to the words of the songs. There were always people around her even there. She had a knack of attracting people. The cocktail waitress pausing to tell her the latest joke, the pianist playing her favorite songs and everyone pressing drinks on

her and urging her to sing. And Gloria couldn't refuse.

I told her so, one night after a particularly long and tiresome night.

"You can't say no to anything or anybody, can you?" Then I had to turn away quickly from the startled hurt look in her eyes. But she got over it. She always acted like nothing mattered. And she sang

"When things occurred in the olden days
The Greeks had a word or a golden phrase
For a sigh or a kiss
Or a moment of bliss
But did they have a word for a wonderful feeling like this?
Falling in love for the first time
In my first affair
Feeling that ready to burst time
Because you are there. . . ."

Her eyes searched for me whenever I was working in the dim lit lounge but I'd pretend to be busy serving drinks or on my way back to the kitchen. I left the bar without looking back. I didn't like to see her on display for all those people. I took a quick look back before I pushed through into the kitchen.

Gloria swallowed a few words but covered it by drinking deeply and smiling a newer, brighter smile, then tilted her head and finished the song.

It was the next day that I took the car to work. It was really more convenient for me. The following day, I came home with a fifth of vodka and a six pack of quinine water and found her already dead drunk. She had passed out on the kitchen table. A litter of bottle caps, wet facial tissues and cigarette butts were strewn on the table. Evidently she had knocked over the ashtray. There was an almost empty glass of red wine near her hand and a completely empty half gallon bottle sitting on the table. California Ruby Port. There was only one glass dirty so she must have finished the half gallon by herself. I tried to wake her, but her sleep was deep and unbreakable. For a moment, I watched her with the first distaste I had ever felt for her.

Her face was pushed out of shape by the arm cradled under her head. No make up. The worn blue bathing suit, only the top showing. She was wearing the walking shorts that had decorated the shower stall for so many weeks. They were unpressed and her feet were bare. Her brown hair was streaked with the sun and spread across her hunched shoulders in tangled confusion.

She moaned softly in her drunken stupor. I left her half sitting, half lying there all night. All I could do was make a funny mouth clearing noise in my throat and go to bed alone.

One more day passed and we had that landmark quarrel; the definitive moment in a relationship when the pattern alters, the forces

of character and personality shift, when accident and happening combine till there is a mysterious chemistry and one human being assumes dominance over another.

The quarrel, as is often the case in major conflicts, was over almost nothing. All of a sudden, I couldn't stand the way Gloria was eating.

"Do you have to stick your tongue out to meet your food half way? If something falls on the table, you can always scrape it up with the next forkfull."

Gloria ignored me, spearing another portion of salad with a deliberately wild motion that dropped lettuce chunks and cucumber slices in greasy abandon.

"That's the last clean table cloth."

She didn't stop chewing while she answered. "So?"

"So, you haven't washed anything for over a month."

Gloria wiped a streak of dressing from her chin. "You paying me to be a laundress? Or testing your crummy jokes?"

I shoved back my chair and stood. "What's the matter with you? I never saw one person change so much in my life. If you're not stewed to the gills, you're acting like a fishwife. You used to be fun."

That touched her. She leaned back in her chair, squinting up at me.

"Used to be. I used to be a lot of things but I've changed for you. I used to eat in rhythm with you . . . you ate fast, I ate fast. You drank slow, I drank slow. You liked to hear me laugh and I laughed. Now, I don't laugh anymore."

I grabbed her arm. "I want you to be like I want you to be and you're acting like you're crazy. Nobody ever told you to stop acting normal."

She tore her arm loose. "How can anybody change so much and act normal. I've changed myself so much you hate me for what I've become. Now leave me alone. Let me go."

"I'll never let you go." My hands bit into her shoulders. "You're never going to be with someone else the way you were with me. You never would say no but you said yes to me, and that's the way it's staying."

Gloria pulled herself away from me and ran into the small bathroom. The door slammed behind her.

I stood in front of the door breathing in heavy gasps.

"Come out of there, Gloria."

There was no answer. I turned the knob but the door was bolted on the inside.

"Gloria, come out of there. Your dinner's getting cold."

She laughed a raucous sobbing catcall in a strange soft voice.

"Gloria, come out." I hammered on the door until the thin wood shuddered under the pounding. Then I braced one foot against it and shoved. The simulated pine

panelling splintered easily and the door swung open.

She was half kneeling on the floor, her cheek resting on the edge of the wash basin, one hand open and reaching toward the water faucet. From her wrists, a thick red spurt of blood spilled over her forearms and splattered on the tile floor. A single edged razor blade fell from her other hand. Gloria's eyes were squeezed tight in a secret, mocking smile.

I bent down to pick her up and strained to hear the words she whispered into my ear.

"Let me go."

Hours later. Her wrists had been tightly if inexpertly bandaged. First aid wasn't my long suit. I sat watching her until her eyes opened and the secret smile was gone. She was changed. Her eyes held mine in a level glare, burning and feverish.

"Get me a drink." Her voice rose a half tone, demanding, whining. "A strong drink. Not beer. I'm only going to drink beer when you're broke." Her white bandaged hand weakly pushed the bottle of beer away, spilling foam on the end table.

"From now on, Jackie boy, you don't have to let me go. I don't want to go. I'd rather stay with you. What you do, I'll do. What you think, I'll think." Gloria smiled as she drank the vodka I'd poured. "And what's more. Jacko, I won't let you go either. Ever. We'll be together forever and ever, so we're even. Won't that be nice?" Her face screwed into a grimace, a smile seen in a warped mirror.

"Is that all the vodka there is, or don't you offer a lady a second drink?" She moaned, still smiling, and held one wapped wrist with a red stained hand. "Especially after all I've been through."

I couldn't find anything to say. Just sat there listening to her in miserable silence.

"Together, and when I say pour, you pour and when I say drink, we drink. But not too much. You got to save some for little old Gloria. You know, maybe I'll wind up changing you. Won't that be one helluva laugh?"

And she laughed a mirthless peal that ended in a stifled burp.

"Gimme another drink."

Four years. That's how it was and this is how it ends and she was ended and didn't know it. Her head rested heavily against the plastic covered seat rest. A sudden relieved thought crossed my mind.

I don't have to use my hands to do it.

All I have to do is push the back of my seat forward, press her head between the two backrests and then slam them together. No more wrinkled neck, no more Gloria.

Her head rolled toward me. I stopped breathing for a heartcatching moment and gingerly pulled

my seat forward, and then with a lightening fast movement I didn't know I had in me, I shoved her head toward the opening, her neck held in a vice between the two seats.

But I can't make the next move. I want to but I can't. Something is pressing into my chest with a hot sharp stabbing pain. My arm can't move. I can't push the seat back. I can't end it. I can only clutch my chest pulling at this thing stuck there that's making me sick and dizzy.

I can see Gloria's face. She's looking up at me, smiling. All the hatred is gone from her eyes. She looks as though she might cry.

It hurts when I try to talk.

"What happened, Gloria?"

Her voice comes from far away.

"Goodbye, Jack. I'm going to get out of this stolen car and walk calmly off the ferry boat and mix with the weekend crowd. Just the way you planned it for yourself."

Everything is swimming in front of my eyes. Her face swirls with layers of red and purple and I know it's my eyes. She looks dimmer somehow and out of focus.

"Gloria." It takes all my breath to yell and yet it sounds remote in my ears. "Gloria, take this out of my chest . . . Gloria . . . what is it?"

She leans back in the car door. "You can keep it, Jacko. It's my Statue of Liberty."

It is very dark inside the car. The car door slams shut and I can hear the echo of high heels receding in the distance as the last lights blink out inside my head. One by one by . . .

interference

BY GLENN CANARY

He kept her from committing suicide. It was funny . . . really.

He saw her when she came down the stairs, but there was nothing special that he noticed about her at first. He had been waiting for the train, leaning against the post and reading his paper. The girl stood near him and looked up the tunnel. He glanced at her again and then folded his paper and watched her. Her face was pale and she was sweating and biting her lips. He thought she was sick and he started to speak to her, but then he decided not to.

There was something wrong with her appearance, too, but it was a few minutes before he thought of what it was. She had no purse.

He crossed the platform and dropped his paper into a little basket. He could hear the train coming. When he turned to look at her, the girl was leaning forward, looking down at the tracks. He walked over and stood beside her. The train came around the curve and he could see the green and red lights on the first car. He looked at the girl. Her lips were moving as if she were whispering to herself.

The train came into the platform area.

The girl threw herself forward and would have fallen on the tracks, but he caught her arm and hung on. She tried to pull away but the train passed them and stopped. The doors opened.

Neither of them said anything. Finally, the girl slumped slightly and relaxed and he let go of her. The doors closed on the train and it started moving. They stood beside each other and watched it go.

Then she turned to look at him and said, "You didn't have to do that."

"You were trying to jump."

"What makes you think that?"

"You were scared and you don't have any purse." That was all he could think of to say. "I was watching you."

"It's none of your business."

"I know it's not, but I had to stop you."

"It's none of your business what I do."

"I know."

"Leave me alone then. Go away."

"Will you try it again?"

"That's my business, too."

"I saved your life. That makes me responsible for you, doesn't it?"

"Don't talk like a David Susskind play."

"I didn't mean to sound that way."

"It's none of your business, but it's not funny."

"I know it's not funny."

"Leave me alone," she said again. She stared at him as if she expected him to argue with her and then turned and started running toward the stairs.

He went after her and caught her arm. "Wait a minute," he said. "I can't just leave you now."

"What are you going to do, call a cop?"

"That's what I ought to do."

"I'll tell him you're a masher."

"Would he believe that if I were the one who called him?"

"I could call one myself."

"Go ahead."

For a minute he was afraid she was going to cry. "All right," she said. "What *are* you going to do with me?"

"I don't know. I never saved anyone's life before." He smiled at her. "What's your name?"

"Peggy."

"Peggy what?"

"You're not going to know me that long."

"My name is Alan Johnson."

"So go away Alan Johnson and let me alone."

"We could have a drink somewhere and talk it over."

"Why don't you go back to work instead?"

"I don't have a job right now."

"Then why don't we jump in front of a subway train together."

"Is that what's bothering you? Don't you have a job either?"

"Oh, for God's sake," she said. She pulled away and began walking up the stairs. When he followed her, she turned and said, "I wish you'd drop dead."

"Let's have a drink first," he said, "and then maybe I will."

She kept walking, but she said, "All right, anything to get rid of you."

When they left the tunnel and came up onto Madison Avenue, they passed a policeman. Alan knew he ought to stop and tell him what had happened, but he didn't

want to do that. He knew they would take her to Bellevue and once he had visited a friend there. He didn't want the girl to be locked in it.

She turned into the first bar they found and he followed her. They sat in a booth and he ordered whiskey for her. He thought it might act as a sedative.

"Listen, Peggy," he said and then stopped and lit a cigarette.

"What's the matter?" she asked. "Can't you think of anything properly paternal to say to me?"

"I guess not."

Her hands were on the table and she had them clenched. She looked down at them and opened them slowly as if she were surprised to find them closed. "I'm sorry," she whispered. "You're just trying to help. You don't know what you're doing."

"Who does?"

"I don't want any help, Alan Johnson. You don't know anything or you'd just leave me alone."

"I don't think you know what you want to do."

"Now you sound like a caricature of a psychiatrist."

"What am I supposed to sound like?" He felt a little angry with her, but he didn't want to show it.

"I don't know. Why don't you do an imitation of a bus leaving town?"

The waiter brought their drinks. "Take it," Alan said. "It should make you feel better."

She drank the whiskey quickly and put down the glass. "Are you satisfied now?" she said. "I'm calm. You've done your duty."

"Why don't you tell me about it?"

"Because I don't want to."

"You must have a reason for wanting to kill yourself."

She shook her head. "I don't want to kill myself. I only want to be dead."

"Is there a difference."

"Yes. I'm afraid to kill myself, but I'm more afraid of what will happen if I don't."

"What will happen?"

"I'll probably be killed."

He started to laugh.

"What's funny about that?" she said.

"It doesn't make sense."

"Yes, it does."

"And this whole thing is so silly. Here I am." He couldn't stop laughing.

She stood up. "You're right, this is silly. I'm leaving."

"Then I'm going with you."

"I'd rather you didn't.'

"But I haven't finished cheering you up yet."

"You can't cheer me up."

"Beautiful girls can always be cheered up eventually."

"I'm not beautiful."

"Sure you are. And I haven't even *begun* my act yet."

"You'll have to do it outside on the sidewalk."

"All right, but I'll probably get

both of us arrested for being drunk."

He followed her outside after he paid for their drinks and she said, "What do we do now?"

"That's up to you," he said.

"Why don't you go to a movie?"

"I don't want to. In the dark I couldnt see your beautiful face."

"I want you to leave me alone."

"No," he said. "Not till I'm sure you're all right."

She started crying. "Please," she said. "Please go away and let me alone."

People were looking at them. Alan was embarrassed and he wanted to just walk away, but he thought it was a good thing she was crying. He took her arm and made her come with him.

"I feel like such a fool," she said.

"You don't look like one. If that train had splattered you all over the station, then you'd look like a fool. Now you just look unhappy."

"I wouldn't have cared then."

"How do you know you wouldn't? I read in the paper a while back about a man who tried to commit suicide by jumping in front of a subway train. The train didn't kill him, but it cut off both his legs. His only problem before was that his wife had run off with another man. Now he'll be in a wheelchair for the rest of his life."

She surprised him by laughing. "I thought you were going to cheer me up," she said.

"Do you think it's funny?"

"Of course, don't you? They say most suicides are caused by a desire for attention. He should get plenty of it now."

"Is that why you tried, to get attention?"

"No."

They turned off Madison Avenue and went toward Central Park. "Why did you do it?" he asked.

"Why do you want to know? What possible difference can it make to you why I did it?"

"It won't make any. I just think it might help you to tell me about it."

She stopped beside a bench. "I'm going to sit down," she said.

He sat down immediately and smiled at her when she sat beside him and crossed her legs. "Why don't you try telling me?" he said.

She asked him for a cigarette and after she lit it, she said, "I wanted to be an actress once."

"Did you?"

"Doesn't everybody?"

"I don't think so."

"Well, I did. I came up here right after I finished my freshman year at Ohio State. I thought I just had to come to New York or I wouldn't be able to live another day."

"And you couldn't make it as an actress?"

"I don't know. I tried for a while. I was even in an off Broadway show, but I didn't like the people or the work. So I gave it up and became a secretary."

"Did you like that?"

"I didn't dislike it. I worked for a nice man and he paid me enough to live on."

"That sounds all right."

"It wasn't bad, but I was lonely."

"Everyone gets lonely sometimes."

"I know that, but I couldn't seem to get to know anyone. I never even had any dates because I never got to know any single men at the office."

"Jumping in front of a subway train is no way to improve your social life."

"Then I lost my office job and couldn't get another. The company I worked for closed its New York office and took all the executives back to Chicago. So I finally took a job in a department store, selling dresses. And I met a man there."

"You see?" Alan smiled. "It can be done."

"He was a floorwalker and we used to go out together, but we had to do it secretly. The store had rules about floorwalkers and salesgirls. If they had found out, he would have lost his job, so we had to pretend we didn't know each other at the store. But we had fun together." She stopped and crushed her cigarette.

"And you had an affair with him," Alan said softly.

"Of course I had an affair with him," she said. "I was lonely, I told you, and he was the only friend I had."

"What happened then?"

"Then I found out he was married. No one ever told me at the store because I wasn't supposed to know him except in a business way. I used to avoid even looking at him, so no one ever told me."

"How did you find out then?"

"He told me. Last night, at my apartment, he told me he was married and he said his wife was getting suspicious of all the time he spent away from home. He said he thought we should break it off."

She began to cry again. Alan touched her arm, but she pulled away.

"You'll get over it," he said.

"No, I won't," she said. "I won't ever get over it."

"Yes, you will. Don't you know these things happen every day?"

"Not like this. They don't happen like this."

"Sure they do. And people get over it."

"Why don't you just leave me alone?"

"I can't now. I want to help you."

She stood up and said, "Take me home then."

"All right," he said. "I'll do that."

They took a taxi to her apartment. He paid the driver and followed her into the building. She rang for the elevator and they rode to the fifteenth floor where she lived. They didn't talk to each other. She had stopped crying, but she wouldn't look at him.

At her door, she said, "You don't have to come in."

"I think I'd better."

"I don't want you to."

He took her key from her hand and opened the door. He pushed her in ahead of him. "I'm not going to hurt you," he said.

"I don't want you in here," she said. She was frightened.

"I won't hurt you," he said again. "I just want to help you." She laughed and he said, "It's not as bad as you think."

"Come here," she said. "I want to show you something."

The dead man was lying on the bed. He was wearing his trousers, but his shirt was on the floor. The butcher knife was so deep in his back that none of the blade was showing. There wasn't much blood, but the man's body was waxy and he lay in a bent position as if he had tried to get up and then had died and hadn't had strength enough to lie down again.

"I told you," she said.

Alan thought it was odd that he didn't feel anything as he looked at the man. He turned and walked out of the bedroom.

Peggy followed him. "Why don't you cheer me up now?" she said.

"Why did you do it?" he said.

"Because I wanted to," she said. "That's a good reason, isn't it? He didn't just come and tell me he was married, he came and spent the evening and then he told me. So I wanted to kill him and I did."

"You ought to call the police."

"No."

"Then I will."

"I'll tell them you're involved."

He looked at her and she was staring at him. He thought she was going to laugh. "All right," he said. "All right."

He left the apartment and rode down in the elevator. He felt weak and when he was out of the building, he stopped and breathed heavily before he started walking away.

A woman across the street screamed and then he heard a heavy, chunking sound behind him.

The girl lay across the hood of a parked automobile. The metal was smashed in and one of her arms had gone through the windshield.

The woman across the street was still screaming.

Alan turned and began running away. At the corner, he stopped and leaned against a street light, panting. A man passed him and asked, "What happened up there where that crowd is?"

"A woman jumped in front of a subway train," Alan said. Then he laughed until he was sick.

FENCE WANTED

A fence *is a dealer in stolen merchandise.*
A shifter *is the middle-man between thief and fence.*
An iceberg *is a large diamond.*
A harness *is a setting.*
Unharnessed ice *means unset stones.*

BY DON LOWRY

"SOMETHING'S gone wrong, Tom," Jean whispered as she shook me awake. "Here comes Art and he's running."

"Open the door for him, Mary," I told Art Shan's girl in the back seat. "Hurry, Mary."

Art half-limped, half-hurled himself into the back seat as I gunned the motor and pulled away on the shaded residential street.

"Get out of here—fast, Tom," he gasped. "I'm shot."

"What happened?" I asked, making a right turn at an alley mouth to get off the street.

"I asked for Torres when some dame answered the door. She said he wasn't in. Some muscleman stepped from a side room and tried to heist me. I beat him to it," Art Shan explained between short, gasping breaths. "Tear up your slip or something, Mary," he asked Mary

Hine. "If I don't stop this damn blood, it'll be all over the seat. We're hot enough now without running around the country in a car with a blood-soaked back seat."

"Where'd you get it?" I asked.

"Hip," Art said, as he half-turned to pad the half-slip against the wound. "Know a doctor in this town?"

"No. I'll look at it when we get out to the motel," I replied. I stayed on side streets, trying to find my way to a Lodge Expressway entrance, mulling this bad luck caper over in my mind as I drove more carefully on the wet streets.

"An accident or traffic violation is next on our bad luck list," I thought. "A good jewel score on Long Island—no rumble; too much and too hot for our regular fence in Manhattan to handle; more heat than we'd realized—Boston and Chicago fences freezing on us; walking into a trap with the law in Cleveland; now this attempted hijacking in Detroit and Art with a slug in his hip; and running short of cash, scouring the country for a fence that would be able to handle three hundred thousand dollars worth of hot ice, our girls with us in a car that was ready to break down."

The normally-busy motel entrance was quieted by the teeming rain of the spring night and we were able to get Art into the unit unobserved. ,

"Get that blanket from the car trunk, Jean," I asked little Jean Hart. "If maids discover bloody bed linen tomorrow morning, we'll have all the law in Michigan here."

I ripped sheets and the spread from the bed while Jean ran to the car for a Hudson Bay blanket she'd bought for what she'd called her "Hope we'll get married chest!" She flipped it across the bed and Mary helped me ease Art Shan down on the blanket. I used a razor blade to rip clothing from him. Both girls turned away from the wound at the same time and Mary ran for the bathroom.

"Can you move your leg, Art?" I asked.

"I can move it but it hurts," was his only comment. "What does it look like, Tom?"

"Not bad," I lied, taking the first aid kit which Jean had brought from one of our bags. "I want to stop this bleeding right now. This is going to hurt, Art," I explained as I poured iodine into the open wound."

I jumped back as he jumped on the bed to avoid spilling the iodine. He settled down. "That was the understatement of the week, Tom," he quipped. "But go ahead and finish."

I bandaged the wound and looked at Mary Hine, Art's girl. "Feel OK now, Mary?" I asked.

"I'm alright, Tom," she smiled. "Can I give Art a drink?"

"All he wants," I answered, winking at her and motioning to

up-end the bottle of Scotch she held in her hand. "He's going to need it," I thought to myself. "Jean and I are going out to get some stuff I need for Art. We may be a couple hours."

"Where you going, Tom?" Art asked, half-turning to look up at me.

"That slug has to come out, Art," I levelled with him. "If I take you to a doctor or to a hospital, we're on our way to jail. That makes me the doctor. Right?"

"Right," was his one-word reply.

"I need some instruments and more bandages than I have in this first aid kit," I pointed out. "I also need some cash because we're going to be in this motel unit more than a day or two. I can't pay motel and restaurant bills with three hundred grand worth of ice. I'm going on the prowl right now for what I do need. Don't worry about me. Just lay quiet and suck up that Scotch. OK, Art?"

"You don't know this town, Tom," Art Shan said. "And the car may be hot if we were seen driving away from the Torres house."

"What makes a car hot stopping at the suburban residence of a fence?" I asked, "especially when it was a hijacking set-up. Looks like all the fences in the country are looking for us."

"Whoever that was trying to hijack me," Art replied, "won't need a doctor. And that phoney dame won't need one either."

"You didn't?"

"I did," Art shot back at me, "before they finished me. It was self defense."

"So," I shrugged, "all the more reason why I've got to get out on the hustle tonight. Look after him, Mary. Come on, Jeany," I turned to Jean Hart, "I'm going to make a burglar out of you—or a good lookout man."

"That, darling," she laughed, "will be a minor offense compared to past and present conspiracies. Let's go. See you later, Mary."

"Be careful, Tom," were Art Shan's warning words as we left.

"How bad is Art's leg," Jean asked as I pulled away from the motel.

"I'm not sure, Jean," I honestly answered. "If that slug's in the bone or near an artery, it's damn bad. If it's just in the flesh, I can dig it out."

"What do you need?" she asked.

"A drug store or a doctor's office," I replied, "some surgical instruments, bandages, penicillin or sulpha and some morphine or Demerol. Art might be able to take the pain, or pass out from the shock. But if I can give him a hypo, he'll be more quiet and easier under my amateur surgery."

"Why are you stopping here?" Jean asked as I parked on Livernois. "There's nothing around here but used car lots."

"I can't cruise around this city in the middle of the night with out-of-

state plates," I explained. "Wait here. I'll be back with some Michigan plates. If the law notices you, say the car stalled and that I'm looking for an all-night garage. If they leave, keep the parking lights turned off. But if they hang around, leave them on so I won't walk into a trap with a pair of hot plates. I won't be long."

I pulled into an alley and switched plates, hoping they'd at least provide some protection from alert radio cruiser officers who usually were suspicious of out-of-state plates. I finally found an East Side medical clinic that showed no sign of either a night watchman or a night staff. I parked a few feet back from an adjacent street intersection from where Jean could observe any approaching car from three directions. I tinkered angrily with a Walkie-Talkie set whose operation had not been improved by a three-week bouncing-around in our car trunk while moving over half a continent. It finally tested out OK.

"Keep the lights out and the motor running," I told Jean. "Don't panic if you see a cruiser. It might not give you a second glance. But let me know if one slows or stops. Don't try to run a bluff. Warn me if the police stop and then shoot away like a bat out of hell. Don't try to out-run them on a long stretch. Whip around a few short corners and the first time you get out of sight, abandon the car and walk casually away. If they catch up with you, deny any knowledge of the car. OK?"

"Don't worry about me, Tom," Jean whispered. "You be careful."

I cut my way through a sheet metal roof ventilator and took a fast look around the surrounding neighborhood to detect any sign of my having been observed on the roof. The two-am quiet was broken only by birds and I dropped inside, letting Jean know I was in. Before checking to see if the rear door would open, I studied the single-floor building in an effort to find signs of a conventional burglar alarm or even motion detectors or infra-red equipment.

"Everything quiet out there, Jeany?" I asked over the Walkie-Talkie.

"Yes," she replied non-commitally. "Hurry, Tom."

"Won't be long," I reassured her.

I moved quickly through the small dispensary, gathering everything I'd need to dig that slug from Art's hip except narcotics.

In an adjoining office I saw a small, 150-pound safe and realized any narcotics would be locked in it.

"I can see your shadow through the venetian blinds, Tom," Jeany warned me.

"Thanks, baby," I said as I stepped back from the window.

I studied the small safe from the office doorway and realized I'd need tools for it.

"Anyone around there, Jean?" I asked my feminine lookout.

"No."

I pulled and pushed the small safe to the back door.

"If there's no traffic, pull into the driveway at the back over here, Jean," I told her. "As soon as you stop here get the car trunk open. And move fast. I'm going to take a small pete away from here. Take a good look up and down the street before you pull in, baby. OK?"

"OK, Tom."

I watched her move across the intersection and had the door open as soon as she parked in the rear driveway. I dumped the small safe in the trunk; closed the clinic door; and drove slowly through the residential neighborhood, avoiding main traffic arteries until I reached the expressway entrance.

"Get what you needed?" Jean asked.

"I think so," I replied, watching in my rear-view mirror. "That safe is a surprise package. We'll stop to see how Art is and pull out in the country to open it. Good thing you noticed me through that window. I might have tried to open it back there."

I stopped on a side road to change the Michigan plates. We had registered at the motel with legitimate New York plates and, now that I was out of the city, I saw no need to press our luck at the motel by showing up with a different set of plates.

"Put all those instruments in that basin," I told Mary Hine, Art's girl, "and pour that bottle of alcohol on them. I'll be back as soon as I can."

I left alone, with tools needed to open the small safe, and drove into a wooded area down a gravel road from the motel. In the Long Island jewel robbery, we had gone after what we thought was a five or ten grand jewel score and came away with diamonds too valuable and too hot for our Manhattan fence to handle. The medical clinic safe presented the same sort of a surprise. In addition to a supply of narcotics, I took package after package of twenties, fifties and hundreds from it. At least our ready-cash problem was solved. I dumped the small safe in a deep part of the woodside stream and drove back to the motel. The sun was rising as I parked beside our unit.

"I can't watch," Mary cried as I removed the blood-soaked bandage from Art Shan's leg.

"I'll help, Tom," Jean volunteered.

"I'll need you too, Mary," I insisted.

She ran from the bedroom. I took off the rubber gloves and followed her. In the bathroom, I slapped her face two or three times.

"This isn't any time to get butterflies in your stomach, Mary," I explained. "Art's your boyfriend and if I don't get that slug out, you'll have a dead or, at the best, a permanently crippled boyfriend. Jean can hand me the instruments as I need them but I'll need you to help with

gauze sponges and maybe to hold Art. Dry up your tears and come on."

My only previous surgical experience had been in a prison hospital where I'd worked in an operating room. I knew enough to realize I was taking a helluva risk—infection, that big artery in Art's leg, the possibility that the slug had entered the bone—I could cripple or kill him.

"That's half a grain of morphine sulphate, Art," I explained after I'd given him a second shot. "You're still going to feel a lot of pain. Want me to go ahead and try finding that bullet?"

"Go ahead, Tom," he slurred, half-intoxicated on the better part of a bottle of Scotch and half-out on the two intramuscular shots of morphine.

I had trouble getting haemostat clamps on the small bleeders and noticed a greenish look coming on Mary's face.

"Take a slug of that Scotch yourself, Mary," I ordered her, "and open another package of those gauze four-by-fours."

I opened the wound deeper and still could not find the slug.

"Hold that flash light still, Mary," I warned her, "or I'll never find this damn slug."

"I think he's passed out, Tom," Jean warned me.

I looked up and saw that Art had relaxed completely and kept working. Sponging up the blood, I finally saw a tip, or a fragment, of the bullet.

"Give me those long Allis forceps, Jean, the ones with the teeth, over there, far side of the tray," I explained to her.

It was the slug itself, embedded alongside the bone. I looked around for fragments and couldn't see any.

"Hand me a package of that sulpha powder, Mary, that one," I asked. "Don't open it."

I tore the package of sulpha powder open and dumped the powder into the open wound. I tied off bleeders, trying to remember how I'd seen it done in the hospital. I dumped in some more sulpha and finally sewed up the skin.

"There's your slug, Art," I said, after he came around. "You're lucky it didn't hit that big artery in your leg."

"I'm lucky I got a good doctor," he mumbled.

"Put that 'Do Not Disturb' sign on the door and let's get some sleep," I told Jean after we had cleaned up the mess.

"I'm sorry I was such a baby, Tom," Mary said. "I didn't mean to be."

"You did alright, Mary," I laughed. "As far as Jean and I are concerned, we'll remember only that you carried your end one hundred per cent. And we'll tell Art only that. Think you can stay awake for a couple hours and watch Art?"

"I couldn't sleep, Tom."

"Don't let him get out of bed," I explained. "I don't want that wound to start bleeding. Wake me up for the nine o'clock news."

Tired as I was, after a night on the prowl and playing surgeon for Art Shan, I couldn't sleep. I tried planning our next move, hoping the mental exercise would put me to sleep. No sleep came. I thought back of the three weeks' events that had brought the four of us to this Michigan motel on the outskirts of Detroit—

"This one is good, Tom," Art Shan had explained as we talked over a proposed burglary score in a West 44th Street basement bistro. "It's a jewel score on Long Island—near Lawrence—not too big to bring a lot of heat. But enough for a night's work. A wall safe."

"You and I've worked together on a lot of scores," I observed to Art Shan, "but I'd still like to look it over first. I might notice something you've overlooked."

I drove out to the southern area of the island on the following day; looked the house over in the afternoon and again at night. It seemed a routine job and presented only one hazard, a private patrol service, which Art claimed he had well cased. The one aspect we overlooked, and which was not to be noted from even skilled casing, was the occupation of the home's owner —that of a diamond importer. Unknown to us, we walked into a score that we had not contemplated. According to news reports, after the burglary, our victim had called on clients earlier in the evening and, rather than make the long and unprotected trip back to his Uptown Manhattan offices, took the fortune in jewels home with him where he locked them in a small wall safe. Instead of heat from a routine neighborhood burglary, we found ourselves facing combined pressures from insurance companies, municipal, state and federal law enforcement agencies.

"I wouldn't take them in or out of their settings," our regular New York City fence flatly declared. "Too much money and too much heat involved. And my advice to you boys is to get the stuff off the continent as soon as possible. Insurance investigators will be spreading stool pigeon bait around before sunset and you'll have hijackers as well as law on your tails before sunrise."

"Where to now Art?" I asked, as we left the apartment of the New York fence.

"I used to do business with a swagman up in Boston," Art said. "Let's run up there tonight. This town will be hot tomorrow anyway. Might as well get out before we're scooped with the rest of the prowlers. By morning, the law will be picking up everyone who ever fell for stone work."

"What about the girls, Art?" I asked.

"We planned to leave with them

if we had dumped the ice tonight," he shrugged. "Might as well keep them with us. We can't pull back here anyway. I'll spell it out to them on the way up to Boston and let them make up their own minds. They're over twenty-one."

Both Mary and Jean were no strangers to our lives or life on the lam and saw nothing unusual in taking off for unknown points with two hot burglars in a car carrying the hottest collection of stolen jewelry in the country.

It was the same story in Boston.

"I wouldn't even consider a part of it," the Boston fence explained. "I wouldn't even want it in my safety deposit box."

"Forget you saw us," Art quipped as we left.

"Forget you ever knew me," the fence quipped right back at Art.

We talked our predicament over while driving out of the city, agreeing that we should keep moving and get out of the East Coast area as quickly as possible.

"How you fixed for money, Art?" I asked.

"Couple hundred," he answered.

Between the girls, Art and myself, we had a little less than nine hundred. The car was registered in my name—a two-year-old sedan that had a lot of abuse and a lot of miles—and was in only fair shape in spite of its original six-thousand price tag.

"It should get us to Chicago," I said. "I know a shifter on the South Side that may be able to help us. OK, art?"

"Might as well try," he shrugged. "We have to get out of this part of the country anyway."

Art and I took turns driving and made it as far as the outskirts of Albany before we agreed that it was time for a rest. We checked into a motel, too tired to talk or plan.

"Pick up the New York papers before you come back," I asked Jean after we woke the next afternoon when she said she and Mary wanted to do some shopping in the city. "And fill the car with gas and see if the oil's OK, please."

Art and I looked over the black jewel cases while the girls were away and were debating the pros and cons of removing stones from their settings when the girls returned. The debate ended when we read accounts of the Long Island burglary which we had perpetrated.

"SAFE BURGLARS GET $300,000 IN JEWELS," the headline read. "A Long Island diamond importer confirmed this morning there were unset stones and jewelry, valued at slightly over $300,000, in a wall safe of his home when burglars entered last night. The safe was opened and robbed.

"The jeweler said he and his wife were watching a late television show in a room of their home's main floor while burglars opened the safe in a second floor bedroom . . ." the report continued.

"The burglary victim dispelled

police suspicions that it might be an inside job when he stated no employe of his firm had knowledge of the jewels' whereabouts at the time of the burglary. After calling on a Long Island client at his home, the jeweler deviated from his usual practice of returning the valuable merchandise to his New York office . . .

"All stolen gems are covered by insurance. . . .

"Nothing was disturbed but the wall safe," the news story went on. "Police say the burglary was the work of expert safe burglars. . . .

"Several known jewel thieves and burglars have been picked up by police for questioning but so far no arrests have been made. . . .

"A reward, totalling $20,000 has been offered by insurance companies carrying policies on the gems. . . ."

"How long do you think it will be," I asked Art Shan, "before the law discovers you and I are not around?"

"About as long as it takes the New York City police department identification bureau to run modus operandi cards through its sorter machines and realize you and I are among the few safe workers that can open a safe by dialing," he replied.

"We should get rid of that car," Art Shan suggested. "It's registered in your name and its plates will probably be on an APB by this afternoon."

"We can't walk, Art, I pointed out to him. "Let's keep moving. If we can off these jewels in Chicago, I'll dump it then—if it gets us there. We're short on money for air or train transportation and we have to keep moving."

"Let's switch plates tonight," Art said. "We can pick some up in a wrecker's yard in Buffalo or some other town on the way."

"And," I objected, "if we get stopped on the highway, we won't have a chance if the plates do not match the title. We can't shoot it out with the law with Jean and Mary sitting beside us."

"Don't worry about us," Jean interrupted. "We'll shoot it out with you, Tom."

"You have the spirit, baby," I teased Jean, "if not the brains. The days of running gun battles with the law are gone. Police communications have out-dated that sort of thing."

Art and I took turns driving and sleeping.

"Does this damn state run all the way across the country?" Art asked after we left Buffalo. "I'd like to see some other state highway marker—and some other police cars—than those of the Empire State."

"You'll soon be in Ohio," I said, "take it easy. And observe the highway regulations. A stop for a traffic violation could be permament for us."

I drove from Cleveland to Chicago and we had just entered the

city limits when the continued screeching of the car's water pump told me our transportation had ended until it could be repaired or replaced.

"What the hell's that?" Art asked from the back seat where he'd been sleeping in Mary's arms.

"Water pump's gone," I explained.

"Can we keep going with it like that?" he asked.

"We could—and burn out the motor," I explained, "or draw attention from every cruiser on the streets."

I stopped at the next motel with a "Vacancy" sign flashing and eased the broken-down sedan into its driveway.

"You need some sleep, Tom," Jean insisted when I told her I was going out.

"What I need is to make a connection to unload this ice, Jean. Coming, Art?" I asked.

"Can't you 'phone this guy?"

"I don't even know where he lives, let alone his telephone number," I answered. "And I don't know his name. 'Gimpy,' was the only name I ever heard him called and the only name I ever used when I dealt with him. He hangs around the clubs on Glitter Gulch, and North Rush Street will be just coming to life now."

"Gimpy," Art Shan repeated, "Gimpy," he laughed. "We're running all over the gawdamn country in a broken down car, with our girls and a fortune in hot jewels and the only clue we have for a possible market is some 'Gimpy'. And, by now, the New York law and F.B.I., not to mention insurance investigators, are probably running after us! We should've stole the Brooklyn bridge. It would have been easier to unload."

"Leave that stuff with the girls, Art," I said when I saw him putting jewel cases in his pockets. "We'll move it when we have a market for it."

"I suppose you're right, Tom," he replied. "A pick-up with it would be my luck."

"Or a hijacking," I added. "The law isn't alone in looking for that loot."

We took a cab into the city in our search for Gimpy and, as I sat silently beside Art on the way, I agreed with his feeling that combing the Chicago underworld for him did approach foolishness.

Art and I moved in and out of a dozen night spots, supper clubs and bars on North Rush without finding a trace of Gimpy or anyone else we knew.

"All the thieves in this town must be in Joliet," Art grumbled as we sat at a darkened bar.

"We should have brought Jean and Mary along," I said without looking up from my glass. "At least we could have shown them a night on the town."

"What brings you New Yorkers to Chicago?" a voice murmured

into my ear. "Too much heat in Manhattan?"

I turned nervously and looked at Jimmy Chisolm, a former fellow-occupant of an eight-man cell at Leavenworth.

"Hello, Jimmy," I smiled, "nice to see you. Remember Art? He was . . ."

"Sure, I do," Jimmy Chisolm quipped. "He was always sleeping."

We had a couple drinks together, recalling days in the federal big top. Jimmy made it unnecessary for me to reveal my anxiety about Gimpy's whereabouts.

"Remember Gimpy?" he laughed, "The fence who did the five year bit?"

"Gimpy? Gimpy?" I said, as if I'd forgotten him. "Yes—little guy. Always whispering. How's he doing?" I asked.

"Good," Jimmy Chisolm replied. "He's still too hot to handle any stuff himself but he fronts for some local fences who can handle anything. He hangs out at the French Poodle on North Clark. Give the guy a break if you ever have anything out this way."

"I'll do that, Jimmy," I said. "This is a fun trip but if we're out this way again we'll look him up."

"French Poodle, on North Clark," Art told the driver.

"I hope he's around tonight," I said to Art when we got out of the cab.

We sat at the bar for three drinks, looking, waiting, watching for Gimpy.

"If he doesn't show before one, I'm going to ask the barmaid, Art," I said impatiently.

"No," Art said. "If he's known here, questions would only advertise our business. We stand out already like a couple visiting firemen. We'll come back in the afternoon and wait around."

I saw Gimpy first. He came through a side door and was talking with a lone drinker in the dimly-lit rear of the bar. As soon as the shadowy figure left, I approached Gimpy. Art stayed at the bar to make the meeting less conspicuous.

"Buying or selling, Gimpy?" I asked before he recognized me.

"Tom Dort," he exclaimed. "Where'd you spring from?"

"You have a car?" I asked, ignoring his small talk. "I want to talk business—in private, Gimpy—important business. Where can we go?"

"My car's outside—by the park—a green convertible," Gimpy replied. "I'll be there in a few minutes. You alone?"

"Art Shan's with me," I said, nodding towards the bar.

"Old home week," Gimpy laughed. "See you outside."

Art followed me from the bar and around the corner from North Clark. We sat in the convertible, waiting for Gimpy.

"What are you New Yorkers doing out here?" Gimpy asked.

"Looking for you, Gimpy," I replied. "Know anyone that can handle some ice, including an iceberg and part of it without a harness?"

"I might." Gimpy answered noncommitally. "From the Long Island score?"

"You're up-to-date on what happens in the East, Gimpy," Art observed.

"We read newspapers out here, Art," the go-between for Chicago fences explained. "And we keep up to date with flyers from New York police departments. That stuff is well advertised. If it is the Long Island swag, there's only one fence in town that might handle it—Beerbohm—and he's a bad sonuvabitch. He'll offer you rock bottom prices and, if you won't deal with him at his prices, he's not beyond selling you out to the insurance companies or hijackers."

"Your connections leave a lot to be desired, Gimpy," I said. "I remember the day when you could handle any amount of ice yourself—with no questions asked."

"Uncle Whiskers cramped my style, Tom. I'd still be in Leavenworth if I hadn't squared up with the income tax people, and," Gimpy complained, "the FBI still keep an eye on me. I can't handle anything myself."

"What about this Beerbohm, Art?" I asked.

"He won't be the first chiseler we've dealt with," Art said. "Let's see what he offers."

Gimpy stopped at the Oak Park Arms.

"I'll be back," he explained. "If Beerbohm is interested, I'll make a meet for you. If you make a deal with him, I want five per cent of what he pays. OK?"

"OK with me, Gimpy," I answered.

"Alright," Art nodded.

Gimpy was back in fifteen minutes.

"He'll deal. He's in the lobby," Gimpy said when he came back to the parking lot. "He's wearing a brown suit, short, fat, black curly hair, with a cigar in his mouth. He's expecting you. He'll let me know if he buys. If he does, I'll be at the Poodle tomorrow afternoon—I mean this afternoon. Good luck."

"You Beerbohm?" I asked the heavy set, well dressed lounger looking casually at a morning paper.

"Yes," he smiled. "Are you Gimpy's friends?"

"We are."

"Let's go for a ride," he said, getting up from the lobby chair. "Just get in town?"

"Earlier this evening," Art answered.

"Where you staying?" Beerbohm asked.

"At the Hilton," I lied.

"What've you got to sell?"

"According to the papers," Art replied, "over three hundred grand worth of ice and emeralds. Some harnessed; some not."

"That Long Island score?"

"That's right," I said.

"Why didn't you deal with your own fences in the East?" Beerbohm asked.

"Too much for them to handle," Art said.

"Or too hot to handle," Beerbohm laughed, setting his bargaining stage. "When can I see this stuff?"

"Why not now?" Art asked.

"Have it with you?" the fence questioned us.

"Hell no, Beerbohm," I snorted. "But, if you're interested, we can get it."

"Where do you have it planted?" he asked.

"With some friends in the South Side," Art answered.

Art told him to stop about a half mile from our motel.

"Have some coffee," Art explained when Beerbohm parked at the all night diner. "I'll be back with the stuff."

Beerbohm and I watched through the window for Art and made small talk of baseball and everything except stolen jewelry.

"Here he is now," I said, as Art Shan got out of a taxi, stopping briefly to speak to the driver.

"Tell him to keep the cab and go to the hotel, Room 404," Beerbohm explained, "I never drive with hot goods in my car—and that stuff's hot."

After a half hour's examination with different glasses and a series of grunts and guttural exclamations, Beerbohm replaced the jewels in their cases.

"I don't have to tell you boys how hot this stuff is," he said. "If I buy it, I'll have to put it away in a safety deposit box for years. I'm tying up capital when I do that. If it wasn't for wanting to help Gimpy out, I wouldn't even consider it. I'll give you ten grand for the lot."

"I'm not interested in your philanthropic motive in helping Gimpy, Beerbohm," Art Shan said. "If that's your final offer, our answer is 'no sale.' You're not even at a bargaining point."

"You boys are in no position to bargain," Beerbohm stated flatly. "My advice is to take ten grand and get out. You're as hot as this loot," he continued in a lowered voice as if the hotel room walls had ears. "Every precinct in Chicago has a flyer on you. Get picked up with this swag and you're dead. Sell it fast and the law hasn't a thing on you."

"We've been hot before, Beerbohm," I said. "We might listen to you if your offer was closer to fifty grand."

"You're out of your mind," the fence ranted at me.

"Come on, Tom, let's get out of here," Art Shan laughed. "This guy wants something for nothing."

"Fifteen grand, boys," Beerbohm offered. "That's my final price."

"No sale," I said.

"And some advice for you, Mis-

ter Beerbohm," Art shot at him as he put the cases back in his pockets, "don't get any ambitions for reward money. You can't spend it if you're dead. You read me?"

"Don't worry, boys," he assured us. "I've never seen or heard of you or that ice. Think it over and call me this afternoon. Fifteen grand is better than a stretch in stir—which is all you'll get if the law catches up with you and that ice."

"Good night," Art Shan said, "and go to hell, chiseler."

I watched for a tail as we left the hotel but saw nothing behind us on the deserted pre-dawn streets. We changed cabs three times as a precaution and were too tired to comment on the deal with Beerbohm falling through.

"We can try Gimpy again this afternoon," I suggested to Art as we entered the motel. "He may have a better market."

"We'll see," was Art's only comment.

But Gimpy offered an alarm rather than another market.

"I'd get out of town if I were you," he advised when we found him at the French Poodle. "Beerbohm and the other fences work closely together and he'll have passed the word around. And he wasn't running a bluff when he said you are hot. As long as you have that swag, you're real hot. And there are flyers out for both of you."

"Think we should drop it for Beerbohm's price, Art?" I asked.

"I'm not that hungry, Tom," he quipped, "and I'm not that scared."

"Why don't you see Switzer in Cleveland?" Gimpy asked. "Tell him to call me if he won't talk business with you."

"Is he another Beerbohm?" Art asked.

"You know these people, Art," Gimpy said. "The best you'll get anywhere is ten per cent. And the hotter you are and the hotter the swag is, the less they'll offer."

"What's his address and telephone number, Gimpy?" I asked.

"It's in the 'phone book. Just remember his initials, 'N.M.,' and ask him to call me before you talk with him," Gimpy said. "If you make a deal, send me my end by mail."

Art picked up some Illinois plates while I was having a new water pump put in the car. Neither of us were in a mood to respond to the girls' solicitations and our tenseness spread to both Mary and Jean.

"Why can't we take the turnpike?" Mary asked as Art and I studied a road map for secondary roads.

"We don't know how hot we are," Art explained. "But we know how damn hot this ice is.

We parked on a side street in Cleveland and I went to a pay 'phone to call Switzer.

"Before I say anything more," I said to him, "I want you to call Gimpy in Chicago and ask him

who the two friends are that he referred to you. Then, if you want to talk with us, call me back at this number," I said, looking at the pay telephone's number on the dial. "OK?"

"I know Gimpy," Switzer said. "I'll phone you back when I call him. Wait there."

I lit a cigarette and yawned. "A few more days running around the country and I'll be too damn sleepy to even drive," I thought.

I looked across the street at the car and noticed Art and the girls were sleeping. The thought occurred to me we were sitting ducks. I walked to the car, after leaving the door of the roadside 'phone booth propped open so I could hear the bell.

"Wake up," I said to Art, shaking him.

"Any action?" he asked, as he got out of the car to stretch his legs.

"Switzer is supposed to call me back after he calls Gimpy," I explained.

"I don't like this," Art said suddenly.

"Don't like what?" I asked.

"We're dealing with half the fences in the country and one of them is bound to be a phoney," Art said. "Switzer could be that one."

"We're gambling, Art," I said.

"Let's gamble a little more safely," he pointed out to me. "I'll move the car around the corner and you stay in the bushes behind that 'phone booth. This deal is made to order for a trap—for law or hijackers. Switzer has that 'phone number. He knows we're waiting here. We'll be around the corner. If you get a rumble, I'll have Jean wait in the lobby of the Statler for you. At least we can avoid being ambushed."

Art moved the car a block away and around the corner and I walked to the bushes thirty feet behind the 'phone booth. I was lighting a second cigarette, listening for the bell of the pay 'phone when I saw the black sedan cruise slowly by. It was too dark to make out its occupants but I put the cigarette out as a precaution. When it pulled back again, I noticed its driver and passenger in its front seat were scanning the 'phone booth. I looked up the road in the direction Art had moved our car and saw a marked police cruiser in the moonlight. Its lights were out. In the opposite direction, another cruiser slowed to a stop and three uniformed officers got out. At that moment the 'phone rang and I laughed as I turned away from it and made my way through the brush of the suburban development. I worked my way through a half-finished housing development and kept to back streets until I was a good mile from the trap. From an all-night pharmacy, I called a cab and went to the Statler in downtown Cleveland.

"Like a party, Mister?" Jean laughed two hours later as she found me in the Statler lobby.

"I'll party you, baby," I laughed, "when I get you at a party scene. Where're Art and Mary?"

"At a motel, Tom," Jean replied. "I came in on a bus."

We took a bus to the city's outskirts and joined Art and Mary. They showed no sign of alarm or concern and I noticed two bottles of Scotch and a bowl of ice cubes on the table.

"Join the party, kids," Art invited us.

"I put the car in a garage down the street; changed its plates to your legitimate ones; buried the Illinois plates; checked that ice in a bus terminal locker; and decided to live it up for a night," Art explained. "I didn't know if you got away or not and I didn't know what to expect when Jean returned from trying to find you at the Statler. But, one thing I did, and do, know, Tom," Art continued, "the law and hijackers are on our trail and when they catch up with us they won't find that ice. When we move again, we move without it. We'll send it on ahead by mail. And we'll also send on our artillery by mail. You got that .38 on you?"

"Yes," I answered.

"There's a sub-post-office down the street," Art said. "Wrap it up and check it in a locker of the bus station next door to the post office. If we get picked up for questioning, We'll be clean. And hide the locker key in the shrubbery outside before you come back in. We'll relax tonight and work things out in the morning."

We drank, laughed and loved—not because we had any reason to celebrate but to escape the pressure of flight, pursuit and the sense of frustration—for the night in Cleveland.

"I was beginning to think you were no longer human, Tom," Jean laughed. I'm glad we can sleep for a night without those damn jewels in the room with us."

"No heat from them tonight, Jeany," I laughed "The only heat we have is what you provide."

But when we woke the following afternoon, we faced the same problem all over again—how to sell the stolen jewelry, with fences endeavoring to beat us and law or hijackers trying to trap us with the three hundred thousand dollars worth of jewels.

"The only time we carry that loot —or those guns—from now on," Art said, "is when we are ready to sell the ice or use the guns. Sooner or later we'll be stopped in that car. When we do we'll be able to stand a frisk."

"How do we move them?" I asked. "Tools and 'talkie' too?"

"By the U.S. Mail," he explained. "You want to try peddling them in Detroit, Tom?"

"I think I can get rid of them there," I replied.

"Good, we'll mail them to a Detroit address. If we're picked up on the way, we'll be clean. Package

them up and address them to a hotel," Art said. "Mark the package 'Hold for Addressee,' and make reservations at the same hotel."

We drove eastward on the Ohio turnpike, not caring if we were picked up or not. We were clean. We'd checked the car; our luggage and even the girls' bags to make sure we had nothing incriminating. Art even insisted on shipping the Walkie Talkie and small kit of tools on ahead. And law enforcement officers didn't give us a second look. We had no trouble 'til Art was trapped by hijackers at the home of the Detroit fence.

Mary woke Jean and me just before nine and I rubbed my eyes. I hadn't had more than a few minutes sleep but I wanted to hear the news. What I heard was sufficient to make me fully awake. My pulse quickened as I listened to the announcer,

"Police report a possible connection with the slaying of James Dominic and Terese DeFlores and a breaking and entering in an East Side medical clinic early this morning. Dominic and the DeFlores girl were found in the home of a known underworld fence last night. A trail of blood from the shooting scene to the curb in front of the home supports the police theory that stolen medical instruments and medications, including narcotics in a safe stolen from the clinic, are for use in caring for the apparently wounded gunman. Police are making a careful check of all hospitals, doctors and area hotels and motels in their search for the wounded gunman."

I switched off the radio and turned to Jean, "Pack up, baby. We have to move."

"Can Art move, Tom?" Mary Hine asked.

"He shouldn't but we can't stay here," I replied.

I shut the bedroom door and told Art of the newscast and the score I'd made during the night.

"No mention was made of the money in that safe, Art," I said. "Could be someone was trying to beat their income tax. We're going to check out as soon as the girls pack."

"How much was in that safe, Tom?" he asked.

"I didn't count it, Art. Might be forty or fifty thousand or half that," I answered.

"That takes the pressure off us to sell those jewels," he smiled. "Get rid of that damn car as soon as you can. And mail that swag on ahead to wherever you want to go."

"There's some penicillin in that stuff I got last night, Art," I said. "I'm going to give you a shot of it and bury everything else. I hope it will prevent any infection in your leg.

"Maybe you and Jean should leave Mary and me, Tom," Art Shan suggested. "Heat from a burglary score and from murder are two entirely different kinds."

"You're still hopped up on that morphine, Art," I laughed. "All I ask is that you try to walk out to the car. I'll stay on side roads 'til we get to Toledo and find a spot there for you to lay up. I'll mail that ice and the guns on to El Paso and make reservations at the El Paso del Norte. We'll fly down there—after I dump this sedan in Lake Erie. What do you think?"

"I'll leave the thinking to you, Tom," Art smiled. "You're doing OK."

I stopped on a side road and walked into the woods with the bundle of instruments and medications. In a deep thicket I scraped a hole with a tire iron and buried the instruments, medications and extra bandages, all wrapped in the bloody blanket.

"Which gun did you use, Art?" I asked when I returned to the car.

"The automatic," he said.

I took it from Mary and buried the murder gun deep in another thicket, carefully covering the fresh earth with leaves.

At a small village, Rockwood, I re-wrapped the Long Island ice and remaining gun, mailing them to myself at the Paso del Norte in El Paso.

"I hope we'll see them again," I laughed when I told Art and the girls that we were clean again.

"What about that Walkie Talkie and tools in the trunk, Tom?" Jean reminded me.

I stopped the car on the shoulder of the road right then and kissed her. "Don't ever let me tell you again, Jeany, that you have more nerve than brains. With our records, burglary tools would get us as much time as the swag itself."

I turned off on a side road leading through a marsh and got rid of the Walkie Talkie and tools.

"I hate to see those tools go, Tom," Art Shan complained. "They're hard to duplicate."

"We're out of the prowl racket for a while, Art," I said. "If we can last long enough on this bankroll, we may be able to find a good market for those jewels in Central America or in Europe."

Following side roads, back roads and lakeshore roads, it took us all day to reach Toledo. Jean split the money from the medical clinic's safe among the four of us, tearing paper bands into tiny pieces and letting them drift over the countryside. The closest estimate we could make of the loot from the burglary was between thirty and forty thousand dollars. Art slept, still half-drugged from the narcotic.

Mary Hine redeemed herself completely when she belatedly reminded me that, packed in one of Art's bags was his bloodstained underwear and pants. I stopped at a roadside picnic ground and, while we casually drank a six-pack of beer Jean bought at a roadside store, I burned the incriminating clothing in a wire scrap burner.

"I don't want to press our luck,

Art," I explained when he woke before we reached the Toledo city limits. "Think you can walk at all?"

"I can get by," he said. "I feel better."

"I'll let you and the girls off at a bus stop," I suggested. "Call a cab and register at the Commodore Perry in Toledo. I want to get rid of this car."

"I don't like your idea of dumping it in the lake, Tom," he said. "If anyone sees you, there'll be more heat."

"I can't just leave it on a street, Art," I pointed out to him. "The law would tow it in."

"Put it in a garage overnight," Art said. "Rent a private garage in a residential section tomorrow. Pay the rent for two or three months, explaining that you're going on a trip. By the time it becomes suspicious, we'll be long gone."

I agreed with him and let Art and the girls out at a suburban bus stop.

"See you at the Commodore," I said as I drove away. I watched Art limp and hoped he didn't have to run.

"Any trouble with the car, Tom?" Art asked when I found his and Mary's room.

"I left it at a garage and left orders for it to be washed, cleaned and polished," I explained. "When I put it away tomorrow, the only finger prints on it will be mine. It can be traced to me anyway, but the cleanup job will get you, Mary and Jean out of the picture. How's the leg?"

"Stiff and a little sore. You're a good doctor, Tom," Art laughed.

"You won't think so if an infection sets in," I said seriously. "I'll have Mary and Jean get bandages and sterile dressings at a pharmacy outside the hotel and I'll dress it for you tonight. I'd like to get out of here within a couple days, Art. We'll have to fly over to Chicago to get a through plane for El Paso."

"I'd like to stop in Chicago long enough to look up Gimpy and Beerbohm," Art said. "Or whoever blew the whistle on us."

"If we can get in and get out of O'Hare field without taking a pinch, we'll be doing well, Art," I said. "Forget about going gunning for anyone."

"I'll be busy for a month and won't be using it," I explained to the lady whose garage I rented."

"We don't mind if you use it or not, as long as your rent's paid," she laughed.

I paid her for three months in advance and walked away hoping it would be three months before the police located the sedan. Airline reservations and looking after Art's leg took up the next day. Jean and Mary shopped. Art and I discussed plans for getting out of the country and getting rid of the jewelry.

"Every lamster in the country heads for the Mexican border," Art said. "And ninety per cent get

trapped in the border zone or at the crossing point. Let's not walk into another trap."

"Let's play it by ear, Art," I suggested. "Why plan on what we can or can't do when we have no idea what we'll run into at El Paso. Let's get out of this part of the country and then worry about what comes next."

Jean and I stayed twenty feet behind Art and Mary as we changed planes at O'Hare field. "If Art was grabbed, I'd have at least a brief warning," I thought. But we made the southbound plane without any trouble.

"Here we go again," I said to Art when I unwrapped the package containing the Long Island jewels in our Paso del Norte room. "I'm getting so I hate the sight of the damn things. They're jinxed, I think."

"They're a thirty grand jinx, Tom," Art shot back at me. "And they made a murderer out of me. I'm going to cash in on them—jinx or no jinx."

He had made a connection in Juarez to sell the entire lot for 480,000 pesos and I insisted I didn't want a damn thing to do with the deal, the Mexican fence or transporting the ice across the border.

"How do you know you won't deliver the stuff and get killed in the process?" I asked. "You met these people in a Juarez bar. How do you know they're not law?"

"Because they know people we know," Art explained. "The one guy did time in Leavenworth. I laid a dozen traps for him and every time he came up with answers that only an ex-con from Leavenworth would know."

"Art, Art," I exclaimed, "a bit in Leavenworth is no guarantee that an ex-con's solid. He could be a stoolie or a hijacker."

"If you're so damn suspicious," Art retorted, "why don't you come along to back my play."

"You win," I gave in. "I told Jean I wouldn't get mixed up in the deal but I can't see you go over there alone into that den of thieves. How do we get it across?"

"No trouble," Art shrugged. "Mexican Customs don't bother anyone without luggage. Take a cab. It's that simple."

"Alright," I shrugged. "Give me half of them. If we fall, we'll fall together. Mary know you're going?"

"No," Art said. "We'll only be an hour."

"I'm telling Jean—and leaving my bankroll with her," I said, "just in case we do run into trouble."

Both girls protested and agreed with Art's plan only when we consented to their following us in another cab.

"If you get in trouble," Jean insisted, "we may be able to help." She had bought a small automatic one night in Mexico and had it in her purse. "I can do a lot of damage with this toy if I have to."

"You'll get your pretty head blown off with it," I told Jean. "Throw it away or leave it here. If we get back here without trouble, American Customs officers may find it in your purse."

"Where it will be, smartie," Jean laughed, "no U.S. Customs officer would dare reach."

"Let's go, Art," I said. "Haywire dames and more haywire ideas. Let's get it over with."

Surprisingly and, I thought, suspiciously, after Art had been paid off in thousand peso notes, the two Mexicans made a careful examination of the set and unset stones and smiled as they counted out the money in the suburban Juarez motel room.

"Where can we exchange this money for American dollars or a cashier's check?" Art asked the taller of the two.

"At any bank in Juarez or El Paso, senor," the Mexican explained.

"Let's do our banking, Tom," Art said as we left the motel. "Banks are still open," he continued as he looked at his watch. "I told you there'd be no trouble."

We joined Jean and Mary in the cab they'd kept and asked the driver to take us to a downtown Juarez bank.

"We'll get two cashier's checks, Tom," Art smiled. "There'll be less trouble getting them across the border than there would be with a bundle of cash. I'm glad to get rid of that stuff. We finally did it," he laughed.

We entered the bank together and walked to the manager's office.

"I've just closed a business deal down here, sir," Art casually explained to the bank manager. "I'd like to buy two cashier's checks or your bank's money order for the pesos I've received."

"We'll be pleased to assist you, sir," the manager suavely replied. "Will you have a chair?"

A clerk came into the office, smiling at us, asking the manager what he could do.

"This gentleman has some currency he would like exchanged for two money orders, Jose."

Art handed over the manilla portfolio to the clerk who began counting the banknotes. He stopped after snapping up half a dozen of the banknotes and held one up in the window's light. He examined it and handed it to the Juarez bank manager.

"It has the feel of counterfeit, sir," the clerk said.

The manager examined it more closely and then selected other notes from the pile on his desk.

"I'm afraid, gentlemen," he said politely, "you have been victims of a swindle. With whom were you dealing?"

Art explained we had sold a shrimp boat to a buyer from Matamoras.

"Your buyer paid you off in counterfeit," the manager observed.

While questioning us, he had triggered an alarm. Art and I looked towards the office door at the same time as two uniformed officers walked in. The bank manager explained the situation, viewing us less politely than when he first welcomed us.

Questions from the Mexican Federal Bureau of Investigation were even less polite, especially when they learned of our American records.

Jean and Mary, experienced in the ways of arrest, bondsmen and attorneys, saw that something had gone wrong in the bank and remained in the background as Art and I were taken into custody by Mexican authorities.

On the second day of our imprisonment and questioning in the vermin-infested Juarez lockup, two attorneys showed up, explaining they had been retained by our "friends."

Their representation and comments by an FBI agent from El Paso, resulted in our being handed over to the U.S. authorities.

"Counterfeiting isn't their game," the special agent explained to the Mexican FBI official. "These boys are second story artists."

After ten days, the federal D.A. decided he had no case against us and without the jewels, New York authorities gave up the idea of extradition.

"Off the record, Tom," an FBI agent asked me, "did the Mexican fence outsmart you and pay off in queer pesos for that Long Island jewelry?"

"As I said," I laughed, "I don't know what you're talking about."

Attorneys' fees in Juarez and El Paso made a dint in our bankroll but we were far from broke.

"What now, Tom?" Art asked as we walked from the federal office.

"That," I said, "was too close for comfort. I think Jean and I'll head back up to Toledo and pick up that sedan. No heat now."

"Not for you, Tom," Art agreed. "I don't think I'll head for that part of the country—too close to Michigan. Heat from murder doesn't cool off. They may not have a clue pointing to me but I don't think I'll press my luck by back-tracking. I'll be around Los Angeles or San Francisco. Look me up if you come west. And Tom," Art Shan paused, "if you run into Gimpy or Beerbohm in Chicago get some licks in for me—and some lumps on their heads."

HAP SAW IT even before the mother screamed. The kid had stepped off the curb at the corner and was standing on the pavement as the big orange bus made its turn, and his head jerked around in wide-eyed terror as the heavy rear wheels rolled toward him.

It was over in a couple of seconds, but to Hap it was like a long minute frozen in time as he saw the boy's paralyzed fear and the inexorable wheels. The scream was drowned by the roar of the big diesel. But in the first second Hap had jumped forward, and in another he had jerked the kid back. He felt the side of the bus roll his golf bag off his shoulder as it slid past him.

The walk light flashed on as Len caught the golf bag and handed it to Hap. The mother and child froze in a sobbing clinch. A red-faced man in a damp shirt took off his straw hat and mopped his forehead. "By golly, friend, that was close!"

Hap ignored him, and with Len he crossed the street at the same strolling gait they had taken from the parking lot. He was into his thirties, with the mid-section bulge of a man who gets away from his desk barely enough to keep up his tan. He was conscious of the bulge every spring when he put on a sport shirt. There was pink across his forehead toward the retreating hair line, where he always peeled at the beginning of summer.

When they were on the opposite corner, he said to Len, "A thing like that can shake you."

"Nice looking kid," Len said. "About the same age as Jeff."

"Like I think about that kid," Hap said. "You can't be too careful."

MOTHER'S DAY

BY

DONALD EMERSON

"Looks a lot like my Ted." Hap shook his head. "Kids! They get out some place, they get excited."

The downtown sidewalk was crowded with shoppers and office workers hurrying to restaurants before the noon rush. Hap barely saw them. "Funny how a thing like that doesn't hit you right away."

"Happens too fast." Len held the solid glass door as they turned into the Merchants and Manufacturers building. "It's hard enough to keep kids off the street at home."

Hap shivered as a blast of damply conditioned air hit him, but it wasn't the sudden chill alone. "It's not so bad in Meadowvale. Traffic's slow off the main street. But they're thoughtless. A ball goes in the street, they run for it."

Len waited for the light and gong of one of the automatic cars. "They don't think," he agreed.

He was taller than Hap, younger and leaner. Though he shaved close, there was always a beard color, and his bare arms were hairy. He looked hard. It was partly the thin face and long hands, partly the look of the deep-set black eyes.

It was close to noon, and the elevator came down loaded. There were other people going up also, and Hap waited while they punched buttons for their floors. As they did so, the buttons lighted. After the door slid closed and the elevator started up, Hap leaned past the tanned back of a girl in a sun suit to touch one of the unlighted buttons.

"I want to get in eighteen," he said to Len.

"Should be time. Nice day."

They got off at six and walked down to three by the inside stairs. "The Boss always played it this way," Hap remarked.

Len pulled upon the heavy fire door on three. "I don't see it. Like you meet somebody."

"The fat broad was getting off on three."

Hap had the key to 318, and it opened the door without his touching the knob. As soon as they were in, he locked the door from the inside, again without touching the knob. There was mail on the floor below the slot, but they left it there and went into the other room with the double window facing the side street. Len closed the solid door from the reception room with his shoulder.

Together they laid the golf bags on the carpeted floor, and Hap knelt beside his. Len walked toward the window. Hap waited until Len's hands were out to raise it before he said, "Gloves!"

He zipped open the ball pocket of his golf bag and pulled on gloves as Len came back from the window and knelt to find his own pair. "Like I think about that kid," Hap said. "You can't be too careful."

Len nodded. "It's a good system. One man might be thrown off. Like I was going to open the win-

dow. I was thinking of something else."

"Forget about the kid."

Len shook his head. "I was thinking about Yellowstone. With the bonus, we're taking a couple weeks extra and going clear to the Coast. But I haven't got a reservation for a cabin in Yellowstone."

Hap was busy fitting the equipment he'd taken from slings inside his golf bag. "Pretty late, isn't it?"

"Betsy's got her heart on it."

Hap watched Len work. He fitted barrel, stock, silencer and telescopic sight with professional skill, his face blank. He even stood to test before Hap was ready, but that was because Hap was watching him. He hadn't had Hap's experience.

He was a good man, already going places in the organization, and Hap wanted to give him a good report. Len had done his time over a woman really, though they sentenced him for the account-juggling he'd done to keep her. That was all past now; he was settled and steady, a good family man. He'd even taken a couple of courses, and he talked CPA. The Boss had played along with the CPA bit, though they both knew the law.

That was before the Boss ran out of appeals and left the state for a federal term. He'd said a couple of times there wouldn't have been a rap if he'd had Len sooner. Could be. But not Len or anybody could have kept him away from Carla Venucci.

Hap straightened up slowly, his mouth hard. Carla had been poison for every man who'd ever had her, and for some who merely tried. She'd climbed over all of them in spiked heels on her way up from the tenement near the packing plant.

Funny thing was, the men knew it; but not one had ever believed the spike was there for him. Not till he felt it in the soft place.

There was a hard, dry click as Len tested. Hap was a moment behind him, then both lowered so they could load.

"It's a good system, the bonus," Len said. "You going any place this summer?"

"Couple of weeks at the lake is all."

Hap's bonus was already earmarked for a stock with a good growth record. He'd tried to talk to Len about estate-building once, but Len had said, "I got some living to catch up."

That was a while back, and Hap felt his advice might have taken hold when Len now said, "I think I'll sock part of this bonus."

Hap looked at the rounds carefully, though he'd examined each one before. "You have to think of the future, Boy. Social security won't do it."

When the Boss went up, it looked for a while as though the organization might have internal trouble.

Hap had really started his investment portfolio with the bonus he'd taken when Benny Truber got out of line with the other directors. The Boss had said a good word for that assignment.

Communication with the Boss was better now, so the board knew his feelings about Louis del Toro, the first serious rival the organization had faced. Hap and some others even felt that Louis' organizational work had started back when the Boss got mixed up with Carla. It was a little late to prove that, but either way, Carla had gone from the Boss to Louis.

"I don't get why he's marrying her," Len said.

Hap sighted once more before he answered. "Like you said about the bonus, as you get along, you want something in the sock."

"Carla hasn't got anything but what she carries around."

"Louis has. The marriage is Carla's idea." Hap lowered his arms. "And this little present is the Boss's idea. Said he'd always promised himself to give Carla something if she ever got married."

Len glanced at his watch, then looked at the street again.

"Plenty of time," Hap said. "They're right on schedule."

"That's the car back near the lamp post?"

"Yeah. With Bo Olivetti and Little Sam in the front seat."

Hap tried to relax, tried to loosen himself so he could move swiftly and smoothly. Instead, he felt himself tightening, a hard knot building inside him. He didn't want Len to guess that.

"Two birds," Len said.

Hap stared at him.

"I mean, we rub Louis and give Carla the Boss's present all at the same time."

Hap shook his head. "Isn't that funny? I was thinking about the same kind of deal and I didn't get it—I mean about the two birds with one stone."

"Forget about the kid. He's all right, and the bus wasn't near you."

"Nah! I was thinking about Carla."

There was a lot to think about Carla while they waited for her to come out of the photographer's where Louis was having the shots taken. Louis wanted a real artist for this. He wanted something for the papers, and there was even a chance one of them might use some pix. Louis had learned one thing from the organization before he gunned down two of the directors —how to build a front. And not too many people remembered a lot about Carla after she changed her name.

"She used to be Carla Venucci," Hap said.

"Carla Venner was all I ever heard."

"You were away."

Len flexed his shoulders slowly and pivoted without taking his eyes off the street. "I was doing a

lot of thinking in those days. Like what I'd do to Mae when I got out." He licked his lips. "I saw her once. It was all dead. Two kids, and she's getting fat."

"Carla kept her figure. She only had one."

"Where is it?"

"She let it die."

The knot was worse. Hap let his shoulders slump and took a deep breath. Even with the bonus, this kind of assignment took a lot more out of a man than it was worth. Except perhaps this time. With his bonus points, he'd be moving up to the executive committee, and that was worth plenty, aside from the tax-free cash.

"So Carla was married before," Len said.

Hap shook his head. "Not married. She didn't want to be tied down."

"What happened to the kid?"

"How the hell should I know? She farmed it out to some halfwit old woman and when the kid caught something Carla waited too long to get a doctor."

Len glanced at his watch again. "'Bout time," he said.

"The board found out a lot about Carla after the Boss set her up," Hap said. He lifted the rifle easily to his shoulder, sighted, and lowered it again. "There was a lot Carla had covered. The Boss never knew about the kid."

"The car's moving!"

Hap glanced away from the doorway just long enough to check the car. It was easing out from the curb to pull up to the vacant loading zone. Then he got the doorway into his sights again.

The setup was fine, and the light was good. The door to the photographer's studio was eight feet back from the twelve-foot sidewalk. Something like a deer run, for Louis would head straight for the car.

As the car pulled into the loading zone, Len said, "Five gets you ten Bo wheels out of there without even looking to see what happened."

"Lousy odds. I'll give you two strokes if he doesn't."

Then he saw the movement just beyond the glass door and made out Carla in a white linen suit. There was a reflection off the door that made it hard to see, and for a moment he couldn't be sure Louis was with her.

"Here comes the bride," he murmured.

Len didn't reply as Hap took a second to glance at him. Intent, relaxed, concentrated. Hap intended to give him a good report, even recommend him for the board now that Hap himself would be moving up to the executive committee. "Before he gets to the sidewalk," he reminded Len quietly.

Carla came first, paused, and waited for Louis. Cool and arrogant, Hap thought, now the packing plant smell was off her; but no amount of expensive clothing

would take away the look of the girl who for years had known her price and learned how to up it.

Her face was clear and close in his sight. Not a wrinkle would show through that makeup. Hap thought for a moment he'd like to have seen her in the bridal gown that was in the big box Louis was carrying. With lace and a veil, Carla might have made him think for a moment there was some innocence left.

Louis squinted into the sunlight and his heavy eyebrows pulled together as he scowled. He was an inch shorter in his lift shoes than Carla in her heels, and he was going flabby around his chin. The big diamond on his hand glinted into Hap's sighting eye as Len's gun snorted once and then once again before Louis dropped the box with the bridal gown and crumpled.

Then Hap fired twice and saw the tears in the white linen suit as Carla's legs folded and let her down slowly while she clutched her side, looked with astonishment at nothing, and fell over Louis.

Hap felt the knot unravelling as he knelt beside Len to break down the equipment and replace it in the slings. Tires screamed in the street. "You don't get the two strokes."

"They went fast, all right." Len zipped his bag. "Let's get out of here so I can have a smoke."

Hap zipped up. "Check first. You got your spent rounds?"

"Both of them."

There was noise in the street as they went out, but the corridor was empty. This time they took the cross corridor to the rear of the building and went down the service stairs to the alley, where Len stopped to light up.

"Not for me," Hap said. "Doc cut me down so far, I quit."

There were sirens now. A squad car passed them as they waited for the light at the next street. Off toward Bayside another siren was racing away.

"Bo must have tried running lights," Len said.

"It figures. Big and dumb."

They strolled toward the parking lot. "I keep thinking about that kid," Hap said. "Makes me want to get home, see that everything's OK."

"I could stop at nine, Hap. I want time for the steam room."

"Good, Len."

But Hap was still thinking about the boy in the street who looked like his son Ted, but older, about the age his son by Carla would have been if Carla had let him live.

"You have to look out for kids," he said. "It's everybody's job."

There was an edge of impatience to Len's voice as he threw his butt into the street. "So forget about the kid, Hap. I'll spot you three, and we'll play a dollar a stroke."

Hap nodded. "You're on."

They were almost back to the lot before he added quietly, just for himself, "I'll forget the kid now."

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