
ANC
MANHUNT
DETE VE STORY LY
SEPTEMBER
35 CENTS
A Moment's Notice
by Jerome Weidman
author of
I Can Get It For You Wholesale
Also —
SAM S. TAYLOR
B. TRAVEN
EVAN HUNTER
ROBERT PATRICK WILMOT
— and others
Her fingernails slashed at his cheeks. "Hit him, Eddie!" (See "Some Things Never Change").
EVERY STORY NEW!
THE EMPTY FORT, A Novel by BASIL HEATTER

VOL. 2, NO. 7

MANHUNT

SEPTEMBER, 1954

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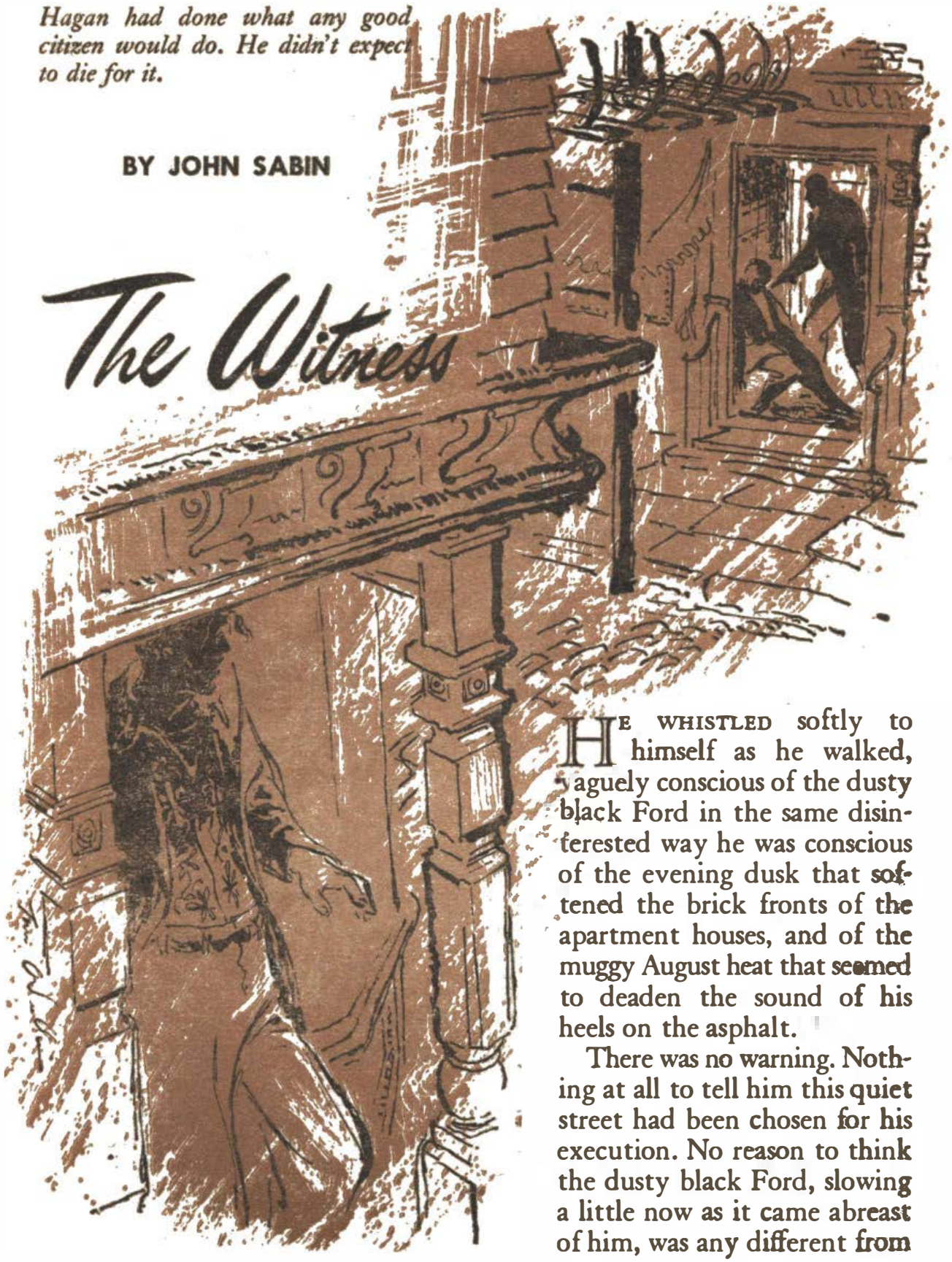
Hagan had done what any good citizen would do. He didn't expect to die for it.

BY JOHN SABIN

The Witness



HE WHISTLED softly to himself as he walked, vaguely conscious of the dusty black Ford in the same disinterested way he was conscious of the evening dusk that softened the brick fronts of the apartment houses, and of the muggy August heat that seemed to deaden the sound of his heels on the asphalt.

There was no warning. Nothing at all to tell him this quiet street had been chosen for his execution. No reason to think the dusty black Ford, slowing a little now as it came abreast of him, was any different from

ten thousand other dusty Fords in the city.

His first awareness that death was only a shadow's length away was the sudden blast of the gun and the whine of the slug past his cheek. And even then the full meaning of the shot did not come to him until after instinct had sent him diving to hands and knees between two parked cars.

He heard the Ford's motor being gunned, and the angry snarl of metal against metal as it sideswiped another car, and then realization flooded through his mind and he knew with abrupt, stomach-twisting fear who it had been that had tried to kill him — and why. It was a numbed, helpless fear, like none he had ever known before, and it was only after the sound of the Ford had died away that he felt the constriction of his throat and the ice-like sheath of sweat across his shoulders and along his ribs.

He got to his feet slowly, put a hand against a car fender a moment to steady himself, and then walked the last half block to his apartment house as rapidly as he could. He was aware that the shot had brought people to the sidewalks and doorways and that they were shouting questions to one another, but he paid no attention to them.

When he reached his apartment, he dialed a number in the district attorney's office and asked to be connected with Detective-lieutenant Garren. A moment later he heard the detective's voice, a deep, impatient bass. "Lieutenant Garren speaking."

"This is Mark Hagan, Lieutenant."

"Hagan? Oh, sure, Hagan. It's been so damned long I'd almost forgot. What's on your mind?"

"Earl Splade's back."

"Splade? You must be mistaken. That bastard's gone for keeps."

"The hell he is," Mark said. "He just took a shot at me."

"He what!"

"He just tried to kill me."

"You sure it was Splade?"

"Who else would it be?"

"Where was this? I mean where were you when he tried to —"

"About half a block down the street," Mark said. "He missed, but it was pretty damned close."

"Jesus."

"He was in a Ford. Last year's, I think. A black coupe."

"You get the license number?"

"No."

There was a pause. Then Garren said, "All right, Hagan. I'll put out a city-wide for him. You sit tight. I'll be — Where are you now?"

"I'm home."

"I'll be there in ten minutes. And listen, Hagan. Stay away from windows, and don't open your door till you hear my voice. Okay?"

"Okay."

"Don't open it for anybody."

"Okay."

"Ten minutes," Garren said, and hung up.

Mark put the phone down slowly and stood staring at it without quite seeing it while he dried the palms of his hands against the sides of his trouser legs. Then he walked back to the hall door, threw the bolt, and crossed to the sofa to wait for Garren.

It's funny, he thought, how much a year's anxiety can change a man. You see a murder committed, and tell the police about it. You do it without thinking too much about it, because, at the time, it seems like the only thing a guy with any guts should do. You go through hundreds of police pictures, and finally identify the murderer for them, and agree to be a witness against him when he's caught. You figure any guy who'd do less than that, who'd chicken out just because the killer wasn't behind bars, was no man at all. And then the weeks and months dragged by, and the doubts began. You began to learn a little about the man you had identified, the man you had been so willing to testify against.

You began to realize you had made yourself a target for a professional killer.

He lit a cigarette and had smoked it halfway down when he heard heavy footsteps in the hall, and then Garren's voice at the door.

There were two other detectives with Garren, men with tired faces and alert eyes that seemed to take in Mark and everything in the apartment in one quick sweep.

"You remember Scanlon and Licardi here, don't you, Hagan?" Garren asked. "I introduced you once when you were down at my office."

Mark and the detectives exchanged nods.

"All right, fellas," Garren said. "Better get back downstairs and stake yourselves out. Scanlon, you take the front. Licardi, you —"

"Yeah, I know," Licardi said. "I take the alley out back. It's always me that's got to stand in the stinking goddamned alley."

Garren grunted and closed the door behind the detectives. "The guy's tired," he said. "He's worked better than thirty hours straight."

Mark motioned Garren to an easy chair, and sat down on the sofa across from him.

Garren dropped his hat on the floor beside the chair, ran his fingers through his thick gray hair, and leaned forward.

"You look a little white around the gills, kid," he said.

"All right," Mark said. "So the guy scared hell out of me. I won't crap you about it. He scared me plenty. When I was in the Army, I went places that bastard wouldn't have the guts to stick his head. But this is different. . . . This is something you aren't prepared for, something you can't do a thing about."

"Yeah. Well, you got nothing to worry about. We'll get him, sure'n hell."

"Maybe you'll get him. That's all — maybe."

"Maybe, nothing. We'll get him.

And fast." He paused. "You sure you didn't get any part of that license number?"

"No. I hit the pavement, and stayed there."

"Uh-huh. Well, I hope we can take him without killing him. Maybe there isn't much chance of our getting him alive, but we're sure going to try. We got an open and shut case against the guy, what with you being an eye-witness and all, but that isn't all we want him for. Not by a damn sight. The D.A. figures Splade can clear about a dozen kills for us — if we can take him alive."

"A dozen?"

"At least. That guy was hiring out his gun before you were born. But he's cool. He always pulled his stuff solo. We never had enough on him before to even go to the grand jury. But now we have. We've got everything we need, including an eye-witness — you. When Splade sees he's had it on this one, he'll open up on the others. He'll want like hell to bargain for a second-degree rap, instead of murder one."

Mark stared at him. "But I thought —"

"Yeah," Garren said. "You thought Splade was a sure thing for the chair." He shook his head slowly. "Well, he isn't. If we can wipe a dozen or so murders off the slate, then we'll do business with him. After all, Hagan, this is an election year. All those wipe-offs will look mighty good for the D.A. And what's good for the D.A. is good for me. I'm not in charge of his special cops just for the hell of it, you know. I got to look out for my own future, just like anybody else." He glanced toward the doorway that led to the kitchen. "You got a bottle of beer, Hagan? It's a damn hot night."

Mark got up and walked back to the kitchen, thinking about another hot August night, a year ago, when he had talked to Garren for the first time. It had been less than an hour after he saw Earl Splade shoot down the man in the doorway. He'd been hurrying along Colmar Street when the sudden rain had started. He'd stepped into a doorway to wait it out, standing well back in the shadows. A few minutes later, two men had come along the other side of the street and stepped into a doorway opposite him. He'd paid no attention to them, until he heard the shots. Four of them, very close together. Then one of the men was slumped down on the sidewalk and the other man was running across the street, directly toward Mark. For a moment, Mark had thought the man was going to run into the same doorway, but the man had veered aside at the last instant and run into the alley alongside the building.

Mark punched holes in two cans of beer and walked back to the living room. He handed one of the cans to Garren, and sat back down on the sofa.

"Thanks," Garren said. "Like I

was telling you, you got no worries. We'll make sure he doesn't get in the building. As long as you just sit tight, you're okay." He sipped at his beer, studying Mark over the rim of the can, then shook his head thoughtfully. "Damned if I can understand it. Splade's considered a dead shot. His car must have bounced or something, or he'd have got you the first time."

"The bastard's crazy, Lieutenant. He's crazy as all hell."

"Sure he's crazy. He's a psycho from way back. Any guy that loves his work as much as Splade does is missing a few cogs somewhere. We even got a pretty good idea he did some of those kills for free, just for the pure hell of it." Garren got to his feet and walked toward the door. "We'll keep stake-outs on this place from now on, Hagan. But if you absolutely *have* to leave the apartment for anything, give me a call and I'll send a man over to take you wherever you want to go and bring you back again."

Mark moistened his lips. "What about my job? I'll have to go to work, Lieutenant."

"Better forget it for a couple of days. I'll square it with your boss."

"Yes, but —"

"No buts. If we haven't come up with Splade in a couple of days, I'll arrange for a cop to stick with you every minute, from the time you leave for work until you get back in the apartment again at night." Garren opened the door, then paused. "That understood, Hagan? You don't leave here, without giving me a call. All Splade needs is one more chance at you, son. A guy like that doesn't miss twice."

For almost a full hour after the detective left, Mark sat slumped on the sofa, his beer still untouched, listening to the traffic sounds from the street below, the soft dance music from the radio in the next apartment. Just a little more than an hour had passed since Splade had tried to kill him, he reflected, and yet the nightmarish moment already seemed far in the past. And then he realized that the nightmare had been with him ever since he had told the police he had seen Splade murder a man in a doorway. It had been there all this time, a full year, but he had denied it; the actual attempt on his life had merely ripped away that denial and left him standing face to face with reality. With horror.

It did no good to tell himself that Garren and the cops he'd staked out in front and back of the apartment house would protect him the best they could. They would, if only because they knew the newspapers would scream if they let Splade get to him. But what if months and years dragged by? What then? Cops were only human, and vigilance could relax. Just a little. Just enough.

And suppose Splade *was* caught — would that change the picture very much? It wouldn't, he knew. A

long-time professional killer like Splade would have a lot of friends just like himself. Even from a cell he'd be able to send one of his friends to do his killing for him.

And, returning to Mark's mind again and again, was the memory of what had happened to another witness in another city not too long ago. The witness had recognized a wanted criminal, told the police where to find him, and had thereby become a national hero. The wanted man had been jailed — but that had not protected the witness. A few days later, the witness had been suddenly and skillfully murdered just a few steps from his home. But the fact that he had been murdered for seeing too much was no more horrible than the *way* he had been murdered. He had seen too much, and so, as an unforgettable lesson to other would-be witnesses, his killer had shot out both his eyes.

The phone rang.

Mark lifted it and forced a level tone to his voice. "Hello."

There was no answer. There was a whisper of breath against the transmitter on the other end of the wire, and that was all. In the background Mark could hear a surge of sound and music and the intermittent clatter of metal wheels on rails.

"Hello," he said again. His palm was suddenly slippery with sweat, and he transferred the phone to the other hand. He felt as if his sense of hearing had somehow grown more acute, as if he possessed an almost animal acuteness. He heard the sound of breath again; then the phone went dead. For just the time it took another man to expel his breath twice, he had listened, and yet it was enough. He knew it was Splade. It *had* to be Splade. It had to be Splade checking to see whether Mark was in his apartment or had gone into hiding somewhere else. There was no other answer. Splade would have reasoned that Mark would think someone had gotten a wrong number.

Mark put the phone down slowly, swallowing hard. The background sounds he had heard still hung in the air, and now Mark recognized them for what they were. There could be no mistaking the source of the music. Only a calliope produced music by a series of whistles; nothing else could possibly produce the same effect. The bright, piercing music had been coming from the calliope on the merry-go-round at the amusement park. And the intermittent clatter of metal wheels on rails had, of course, been the roller-coaster.

Mark reached for the phone again. If Lieutenant Garren knew the general area from which Splade had called, he could send men out there. And Garren, he knew, would want to trace the call.

Then, very slowly, he put the phone down.

It was no good.

Even if they caught Splade as a result of this call, there was the cold

fact that Splade might get one of his friends to take over where he left off. Even with police protection, Mark knew, he would never have another moment's peace of mind.

And there was something else — something that had become focused and articulate in his mind in the same instant he had lifted the phone to call Garren.

Not only would Earl Splade get to him *eventually*, regardless of whether or not Splade was caught, but there was the fact that, from now on, Mark would have to live with a policeman always at his elbow, watching him every minute, staying with him all day at work. He wouldn't even be able to take a girl to a movie without . . . The knowledge that he'd never be able to enjoy normal living and privacy again sickened through him; and, gradually, the realization grew that there was only one thing for him to do.

Fifteen minutes later, Mark stood on the roof of the apartment house, staring down into the blackness of the passageway between his building and the next. He felt a little queasy when he thought about the jump he would have to make. The chasm was almost five feet across, and there was nothing but empty space between him and the asphalt floor of the passageway nine stories below. But he had no choice; there was no other way of leaving the building without Garren's stake-outs seeing him.

He walked back to the far side of the roof, took a deep breath, then ran and leaped.

Cinders ground into his palms and knees, but he made it.

He lifted the trap door in the roof, climbed down the metal ladder, and then went down the fire stairs to the side entrance. The side entrance opened on a small court. He crossed the court, staying within the shadows of the buildings, passed between two private homes, and emerged on Delaney Street. He turned east on Delaney and walked the two blocks to the hack stand at Elm and Hardesty.

Mark had the cab stop when they were within a block of the park, and covered the rest of the way on foot. At the garish neon arch of the entrance, he paused, studying the street. The park was some distance from the city proper, and there were few buildings here. From where he stood he could see all of them. There was a garage, a drug store, a lunchroom, two bars, and a candy store. Further down the street there were a few small frame bungalows. And that was all.

Except for this one street fronting the park, Mark knew, the park was surrounded by dense woods. There might be a few shacks somewhere out there, but nothing more — certainly no place that would have a pay phone. And Earl Splade would hardly have used anything *but* a pay phone, Mark knew, even though he might have felt sure Mark would

think it was merely another wrong-number call. Using a private phone, no matter what the circumstances, would have been too risky.

That narrowed it down, he reasoned. The park was enclosed by a high cement wall; the only means of entrance or exit was the neoned arch before which he stood. A man in Splade's position wouldn't trap himself in an enclosed area with only one possible way out. He decided the chances of Splade's having called from inside the park were almost nil, and glanced back down the street.

The lunchroom and candy store were dark, and probably had been for hours. So, if Splade had used a pay phone on this street, as seemed almost certain, he must have used the one in either the garage, the drug store, or one of the two bars.

Mark walked along the dark street to the first bar, stepped inside, and covered its length and back again without seeing a pay phone. He did the same thing at the second bar, and then crossed the street to the garage.

There was a small office at one side of the automobile entrance. Both the office door and the sliding overhead metal door were padlocked. A small night light hung over a desk in the office. There was a cradle phone on the desk and a pay phone on the wall.

He heard a car approaching from the west, and he stepped back into the shadows between the garage and the darkened lunchroom next to it. The car had almost passed him before he realized it was a Ford coupe. That, in itself, meant nothing — but then he noticed that its black surface was dusty and that there was a deep dent in the right rear fender, and he suddenly remembered that Splade had sideswiped another car in his hurry to get away after his unsuccessful attempt to shoot Mark down on the sidewalk.

There were probably a lot of dusty last-year's Ford coupes with dents in their fenders, he reflected; the difference was that this one was in the same small area from which Splade's phone call had come.

He watched the Ford slow before one of the small frame bungalows far down the street and turn into the driveway. Then he half ran toward the house, keeping to the shadows as much as he could. He circled through weeds and bushes to the rear of the house. Just as he came within sight of the car, parked in the back yard, he saw a tall, thin man walking toward the rear door of the bungalow.

It was Splade; he was certain of it.

After a moment a light came on in the house, and Mark moved cautiously to the window and looked inside. It was a bedroom. Splade was hanging his jacket over the back of a chair, a man with pale, slightly protuberant eyes, deeply sunken cheeks, and a mouth that seemed frozen in a straight, hard line.

Mark watched while Splade turned on a small table lamp near the bed, crossed the room to turn off the

overhead light, and came back to the bed and lay down. He seemed very tired, and once he had thrown an arm across his eyes he did not move again.

Mark waited for what seemed at least half an hour, and then he moved carefully away from the window and tried the back door. It was locked. And so was the front door when he tried that. He went to the side of the house and lifted the cellar door, and, a long five minutes later, was standing just inside Earl Splade's bedroom.

He crossed to the bed. "Splade," he said.

Splade jerked up to a sitting position, staring at Mark incredulously. "God . . ." he breathed.

"You son of a bitch," Mark said, and drew from his hip pocket the small Italian revolver he had brought back from the war.

Splade's tongue flicked at his lips, his eyes, suddenly terror-stricken, fixed unblinkingly on the gun.

"You don't have to kill me!" he said. "Jesus, Hagan, you don't have to do that! The law is going to fry me anyway. I —"

"They might not," Mark told him. "They might not fry you at all. And what if they did? You'd still have time to get someone else to do your killing for you."

"God, man," Splade whispered hoarsely. "Give me a break!"

"Why?" Mark asked, and pulled the trigger.

Anne is very pretty, and I'm glad I married her. But she happens to be insane . . .

BY
EVAN HUNTER

Bedbug

MY WIFE was watching me again. She pretended to be reading her newspaper, but I knew she was watching me. I could feel her eyes boring through the printed page. She was very clever, and so she kept the paper in front of her face, but she wasn't fooling me, not any more she wasn't.

"What are you reading?" I asked.

I was sitting in the chair opposite her. She had her legs crossed, and I thought what a shame such a pretty girl and with a sickness like that, and the worst kind, the kind they can't fix, even with all their drugs and their shocks.

"The comics," she answered.

"Which? Which comic?"

"Pogo," she said. "Why?"

She was being tricky again. She was always like a defense attorney, always with a comeback, always trying to twist whatever I said. I understand they get clever that way. The minute they get twisted, they start getting clever, too. Only I was just a little bit cleverer than her.

"Why what?" I asked.

"I mean, what difference does it make which comic I'm reading?"

"I thought you might be reading something gory," I said. I smiled, and she lowered the paper and looked at me curiously, and maybe she suspected I was on to her in that moment.

"Gory?"

"Yes, gory. Death and violence. Something with blood in it. Gory. Don't you know what gory means, for God's sake?"

"Of course I know what gory means."

"Then why did you say it as if you didn't know what it meant? Were you trying to test me? Were you trying to find out if *I* knew?"

"Oh, don't be silly. Everybody knows what gory means. I was just surprised that you asked . . ." She shrugged and lifted the paper again, but I could feel her eyes through the page, watching me, always watching me. I stared at the paper until she lowered it again.

"What's the matter with you, Dave?" she asked.

I chuckled a little, and then I narrowed my eyes. "There's nothing the matter with me," I said.

"You've been behaving so . . . so strangely lately," she said.

"Maybe I'm just beginning to wise up," I said.

"I don't understand you. That's what I mean, the things you say. They don't make sense."

"Does soup make sense?" I asked her.

"What?"

She was playing it innocent, as if she didn't know about the soup, as if she had no idea what I was talking about.

"Soup," I said. "Soup. What the hell's wrong with you? Can't you understand English?"

"Well, what about soup? I don't understand."

"The soup last night," I said. I watched her carefully, my eyes slitted.

"Yes, we had soup last night."

"No," I corrected her. "*We* did not have soup last night. *I* had soup last night."

"It was too hot last night," she said, trying to appear tired, trying to pretend she didn't know what I was driving at. "Much too hot to be having soup. I just didn't feel like any, that's all."

"But I did, huh?

"You said you wanted soup."

"Yes, but that was before I knew you weren't having any."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing," I said. I paused and

waited to see what she'd say next. She didn't say anything, so I prompted her. "Were you surprised I didn't finish the soup?"

"Not particularly. It was a hot night."

"Yes, but I only had two spoonfuls. Weren't you surprised?"

"No," she said. She was being very cagey now, because we were getting closer to the heart of the matter, and she didn't like that. I had to go on with what I was doing, but I felt sorry for her at the same time. It wasn't her fault, her illness, and it was a shame they wouldn't be able to do anything for her. I felt real sorry.

"But didn't you wonder why I stopped after only two spoonfuls?"

"Are we back to that damned soup again?"

"Yes. Yes, we are back to that damned soup again. It's a good thing I have excellent taste buds."

"What are you talking about?"

"My reasons for not finishing the soup. After I tasted it. That's what I'm talking about."

"Was there something wrong with the soup?"

That I liked. Oh, that I liked. That innocent look on her face, that little small voice, pretending ignorance, pretending the soup was all right.

"No, nothing," I lied. "Nothing wrong with it at all. There was nothing wrong with the brake lining on the car, either. Nothing that sixty bucks couldn't fix after I discovered it."

"Here we go on the brake lining again," she said.

"You don't like me to talk about it, do you?"

"We've only talked about it for the past three weeks. What the hell is wrong with you anyway, Dave?"

"Nothing's wrong with me, honey," I said. "No, nothing's wrong with *me*."

"Then why do you keep harping on things? How did I know the brake lining was shot? How could I possibly know that?"

"Oh no, you couldn't know," I said.

"You see? You're implying that I *did* know."

"I'm not implying anything. Stop trying to twist what I say."

"You had the brakes fixed, didn't you?"

"Yes. Because I discovered them in time. Like the soup. Just in time."

"Dave . . ." She stopped talking and shook her head, and I felt sorry for her again, but what could I do about it? How could I continue living with her, knowing what I did about her? And how could I turn her over to people I knew could not help her? I loved her too much for that, far too much. I could not bear seeing her waste away, unhelped, curling into a foetal ball, cutting herself off from reality, escaping the world we both knew. But at the same time, I recognized the danger of having her around, watching me, waiting for her chance.

"You watch me all the time, don't you?" I asked.

"No, I do not watch you all the time. Christ knows I've got better things to do than watch you."

"What's wrong with me?" I asked.

"That's just what *I'd* like to know, believe me," she said emphatically.

"I didn't mean it that way, and you know it. You're twisting again. You always twist. For Christ's sake, Anne, can't you see that you're all mixed up? These attempts you made on my . . ."

"Me mixed up? Me?" She sighed heavily, and I got out of my chair and walked toward her.

"Why'd you make those attempts on my life, Anne?" I asked her.

"What? What!"

"The poisoned soup, and the . . ."

"Poisoned soup! Dave, what on earth are you . . ."

". . . and the brake lining, and that loose step on the basement stairs, and oh, all the other little things. Don't you think I spotted them all? Don't you think I've known for a long time now?"

She stared up at me, bewildered, and I felt immensely sorry for her again, but I could not see turning her over to people who could not help her, I could not see committing her.

I reached down for her throat and pulled her out of the chair, and her eyes opened wide in fright, and she tried to scream "Dave!" but my hands tightened on her windpipe.

She kept watching me all the while, watching me, her eyes bulging, watching, watching, always watching me while I squeezed all the twisted rottenness out of her head until she went limp at the end of my arms.

I dropped her to the floor and looked at her, and in death she did not look as crazy as a bedbug, but I knew she was, and now she would not be watching me anymore, but at the same time I couldn't keep myself from crying.

State Line

MURDER is an alley that runs parallel to the road we all walk, and it isn't as remote from you as you're apt to think. Runs up real close sometimes, especially when you start looking around for one of those nice easy shortcuts.

Yeah. Just a few easy steps away.

My first step started when I picked the Riverview Hotel, Reno's swankiest, to buy a pack of cigarettes. Don't ask me why. On my kind of money, I don't stop at the big hotels when I make these towns on my selling trips. Funny thing, too, now that I look back. I was a block

The plan was perfect. Everybody's movements had been carefully planned—except the corpse's.

A Novelette

BY

SAM S. TAYLOR

away on the other side when I realized I was out of smokes. Standing in front of a big drugstore. But I had to cross over to the Riverview. Maybe it was because of the free bow you get from the uniformed doorman in front of a place like that. Gives you a quick shot of importance, and I needed one that afternoon.

Floor covering's my line. Linoleum, carpeting, things like that. I hadn't sold enough that day to pay for the gas, driving up here from L. A. When the girl at the counter gave me my change I drifted into the gaming room. I was working one of the dime machines when I suddenly became aware of a subtle change in the atmosphere. Something expensive that brushed lightly past my nostrils, and reminded me of a furlough in Paris. I inched my head around just enough to see her. She was playing a dollar machine. The one between us wasn't being used. A load of dimes spilled into the trough of mine, but at that instant I didn't hear them. If they'd been gold ingots, I wouldn't have heard them.

This was it. The dream you're always trying to fill in. The weaving, hazy one out there in space, beyond the other dreams. The one you keep fighting to get through to, without ever making it. Her large lustrous eyes were one shade lighter than her combed-out hair, and her hair was blacker than sin. Don't get me wrong. She didn't look like the sinful type. Whatever her habits, the exterior view was strictly class. She was wearing a gray wool ensemble that tucked in her beautifully tooled figure at just the right places. She was about twenty-five. You don't have to be Dun & Bradstreet to smell money. From the listless way her gloved hand worked the handle and fed silver dollars into the slot, you'd think she was using bottle tops. The eyes stared straight ahead, over the top of her machine. The look was that far-away kind, and there was a hint of brooding.

I finally got back on the beam, and continued playing. A couple of spins later, there was the nearby clatter of a pay-off, then the ring of a silver dollar bouncing on the floor. It stopped against my shoe. I bent over for it, then looked up at the girl. She was gathering her winnings, with that same show of apathy.

I reached over with the coin. "I believe this is yours."

That snapped her out of it. "Oh. Thank you. Are you sure it's mine?" Soft voice, gracious. Finishing school stuff, if I'd ever seen it.

I frowned at my dime machine. "If it tried to come out of this one, it would have choked to death."

The smile that matched her voice widened for an instant, then she turned back to her play. I wanted to say more, push the door open a little wider. I pulled out my cigarettes, but when I started to offer her one my arm acted as though it weren't

there. Just like in the dreams. *Fading away while I tried to slip my leg-irons.* I guess deep down I knew she was way out of my league.

When I glanced over, a couple of minutes later, she was gone. After that, I lost interest in trying to beat the percentages. I went outside to my Chevvy, drove back to the motel room and flopped down on the bed. The dream wasn't quite as hazy this time. I was able to reach out further. Almost touch it. It was after eight when I awakened. I stopped off at a drive-in for chili and beans, then went over to Virginia Street and joined the crowd drifting into the gambling traps. I took a crack at the dice for a while and was a few bucks ahead, but somehow the usual excitement around a crap table left me cold tonight.

I went outside and strolled toward the bridge. Just an aimless walk, but I knew where I'd wind up.

2.

The Riverview was bumper deep in mink coats and big alimony. I ran my eyes over the crowd in the casino without spotting her. No reason why she should be here. No reason, at all. That went for me, too. I should have returned to the motel and hit the hay. I was up here to sell floor coverings, and I had other towns to make tomorrow. *What's the matter, Larry? You getting soft-headed, or something?*

I hung around for about an hour, watched some of the big play, then wound up at the bar. Figured a bourbon and water might wash away that let-down feeling, before I turned in.

If the glass had been a paper cup, the sudden clenching of my fingers would have crushed it. I saw the reflection in the bar mirror. She was seated at the roulette table. I hadn't looked in that direction for the past five minutes. She continued placing her bets while an older man with a top coat on his arm stood behind her, talking. She finally looked up and he kissed her cheek. He was a much older man. Somewhere in his late fifties, I guessed, which gave me at least a twenty-five-year edge. Probably her father, or the old family lawyer. He patted her shoulder, then walked out to the lobby, slipping into his coat just as he left. I slowly finished off my drink, but the warm glow that was spreading inside really came from that picture in the mirror.

She had changed to something dressier and velvety. The mink stole looked at home on her shoulders. There was a lot of sleek merchandise floating around the place, but compared to her the rest were just props.

I paid for my drink, then went over to a bank of slot machines where I could keep an eye on her filled-up table. I noticed her chips were beginning to accumulate. Finally a woman dropped out of the game and I stepped over casually and sat in. I bought a five-dollar

stack and made a few minor bets. She was seated on the opposite side, closer to the wheel. For two or three spins she didn't seem to be aware of my presence. Then she reached over to cover one of the numbers near me. Her eyes flicked past mine, stopped, and returned as recognition seemed to hit her. There was a brief smile that sent a surge up behind my face. Once or twice after that, our glances managed to meet but I didn't push things. I didn't want her to get the idea that my being here wasn't pure coincidence.

She was really piling up chips now. When I bought my second stack I started to match her betting. Once, when we both tried to star the same number, her hand brushed against mine. Just an accident, but the way my imagination was hopping, I thought her smile this time was a trifle less impersonal. Meantime, my chips were flocking back home. After a while she couldn't help noticing I was tagging along on her bets. When number eight came up twice in a row and the croupier pushed a pile of loot toward me, she flashed an amused, "How are we doing?" look. I answered by holding up two crossed fingers.

Around eleven-thirty she stopped placing bets and began stacking her chips. I knew what that meant. Although I was ahead almost a hundred dollars by now, I had far less chips. I slid them over to the croupier before she was half finished with hers.

I was standing in the aisle when she came around from her side of the table. This timequick paralysisdidn't set in. I grinned, "You sure were my lucky charm tonight. Least I can do is buy you a drink."

"Oh." The word made an appealing red circle. I guess I'd surprised her. "You really shouldn't feel obligated. I was pretty lucky myself. Besides, don't you think it's rather late?"

"For Reno?"

Her eyes seemed to study mine for a moment. Then the sales resistance faded. "Now that you've reminded me, I think I could use one."

We found a pair of vacant stools at the bar. She ordered a Cuba libre. I stuck to bourbon.

I introduced myself. "I'm Larry Fletcher."

"Evelyn Bancroft."

I glanced at the emerald cut diamond on her left hand. It was big enough to send a kid through college. "Mrs.?"

"Technically, Mrs. Julian Bancroft."

It didn't sound exactly joyous. "Up here for the cure?"

"Cure?"

"Well — You know. Most women come to Reno for one of two reasons."

"Oh. Divorce." She made a wry face over the lip of her glass. "You mean I don't look like the well-integrated wifely type?"

I gulped some of my drink. "Well, no. I didn't mean exactly that —"

Her laugh surprised me. "Don't take it so badly. Maybe you have keener perception than you think."

I managed to get my eyes back to Mrs. Bancroft's. There were little glints of amusement in hers. There was something else, too. Like the reflection of an object at the bottom of a deep pool. Too deep to identify. I shook my head. "Some fellows talk too damn much, don't they?"

"Talk some more. I'm beginning to like it."

"If I do, it will be about you."

"I can't think of any conversation more appealing to a woman." She clicked her glass against mine, then finished off her drink. I suggested another.

She had a suggestion of her own. "It's just a few miles out of town. You'll like it. They make the most wonderful Trinidad Punches."

3.

The way I felt now I would have rowed her to Trinidad. We drove to the roadhouse in my car. The place was called The Outrigger. Fish nets were draped over it, and ships' lamps glowed on each side of the door. There was that same romantic beachcomber effect inside. We sat in a little bamboo booth and a Filipino brought us the tall smooth rum drinks.

"What do you do, Larry?"

Sounded real good to hear her call me by my first name. "Oh, nothing spectacular. Sell floor coverings."

"Here in Reno?"

"No. I've got an office down in Los Angeles. Represent a couple of eastern outfits."

"We've been living there. Bel Air." There was a sigh. "That is, when we're ever down that way."

"You travel a lot?"

"Just about half the time. Julian has oil properties all over the West Coast. Usually gets miffed if I don't join him when he does his commuting."

"I didn't know they'd struck oil up here."

"It isn't oil this time." She played with her straw. "Income tax."

I guess I looked puzzled.

She smiled, "No, we're not running away from the Treasury Department. He bought a big ranch last month. Twelve miles this side of Carson City. No state income tax in Nevada, you know, if you establish residence here."

"Oh, then you're not stopping at the Riverview?"

"*I* am." She sensed my thoughts. Candlelight glistened on the supple little mouth that worked into a smile. "Not quite like it sounds, Larry. The main house is old. Not fixed up yet, but my husband has been sleeping there for a couple of nights. Wants to supervise the landing field he's having built there. He flies his own plane."

I had the picture now. That wasn't her father who kissed her back at the hotel. Just a guy old

enough to be her father, with a few years to spare. Julian Bancroft. He didn't know it, but he'd just given my confidence a big boost. That's what you need in the selling field. Maybe he had the dough. But I had a few items in my sample-case a man his age could never match. A thirty-year spread makes a big gap. Big enough for a young wife to wonder sometimes. Right now I had a feeling Mrs. Bancroft was in a wondering mood.

She looked at me curiously. "A penny for your thoughts."

"That's putting too low a price tag on yourself."

Her eyes said she liked that. They latched onto mine for a long moment, then her mouth quirked playfully and she tapped her glass. "Think I could induce you to order another?"

I said quietly, "You could induce me to do a lot more than that."

She leaned forward, cupping her chin in her hand. "You're sweet, Larry. Real sweet."

I ordered another round.

Three ounces of rum to a drink can do a pretty good mellowing job. She told me more about herself. Boston family. Solid social background. She admitted to being beautifully spoiled as a child. Halfway through college she got the cold facts. Her father had died, leaving nothing but a lot of unpaid bills. She quit and got herself a secretarial job with Bancroft. Six months later, despite the age difference, she accepted his proposal of marriage. She didn't have to explain the rest. I can add up a score.

It was after two when we pulled out into the highway. The clear Nevada night was like a newly-washed window, and the stars seemed to dangle from unseen threads.

She had cuddled up close. "Do me a favor?"

"Sure."

"Such a wonderful night. Mind driving a while before we turn back?"

Favor. Oh, boy.

I headed for the Geiger Pass. There's a spot where you can park and look out over the shimmering valley. I didn't ask permission. Her head had dropped to my shoulder a few miles back. When I switched off the ignition we just sat there quietly for a few minutes. That perfume was giving my imagination a rough time, but I kept my hands on the wheel.

"Larry."

"Uh, huh."

"Woman has to be crazy to come up here alone with a total stranger, doesn't she?"

"Stranger? Is that how you figure me?"

"No, darling. You know that."

I came around and lifted her chin. Her head inclined against the seat, and starlight glimmered on the irises of her half-shut eyes. The moist lips were slowly parting in about the same ratio that mine were closing in on hers. As they fused, her hand tensed briefly against my chest, then

it went limber and found my neck and pulled me tight until even the night was squeezed from between us.

It could have been minutes, it could have been hours. I'd never know. Once when my hand glided under her mink stole, there was a momentary quiver, then her ripeness firmed against my palm.

The soft whisper finally brought us back to reality. "We'd better go, Larry. Right now."

It wasn't easy for me, but I let her pull away slowly. We were both silent going down the grade. Then I said, "You've started a fire in me, Evelyn. I guess you know that."

"What do you think you've done to me, darling?"

I had to pinch myself to believe it. "See you tomorrow night?"

"Of course. But you'd better phone me at the hotel first. Say, nine-thirty."

Wonderful world. Great big wonderful world.

4.

I'd been treading clouds all day. Business had even been better. On the dot of nine-thirty I dialed the Riverview.

"Mrs. Julian Bancroft, please."

A pause. "She isn't registered, sir."

"Not *registered?* Look again, sister."

"Just a moment. I'll connect you with the desk clerk."

He made it official. "Mrs. Bancroft checked out early this afternoon."

When he clicked off I sat there looking dumbly at the mouthpiece. Dumb was right. What did I expect from something with a million dollar price tag like hers. She had some time to kill last evening, and I happened to be the handy boy. Just that simple.

I didn't dream that night, but I didn't sleep much, either.

Well, just one of those things. Figured I'd shake it by the time I wound up my trip and got back to L. A. the following week. But I didn't. A dull empty feeling was crowding me more every day.

Peggy, who tends the office for me, remarked, "Sure haven't been looking your old self, Mr. Fletcher. Not a smile all week. Maybe you ought to see your doctor."

Helluva lot he could do for me.

A few days later Peggy had a message for me when I checked in. "A Miss Lynn called this afternoon. Says for you to phone her at this number, after dinner."

I frowned at the slip of paper. "Lynn? Don't know anybody by that name."

I put in the call shortly after eight.

The woman answered, "Hello."

"Miss Lynn, please." I suddenly realized I was tensing all over.

"Hello, Larry."

My heart was a stamping mill now. "Evelyn."

"Darling, you must hate me. But don't ask me to explain now. I want to see you terribly."

"Just say where. I'll pick you up."

She seemed to be thinking for a moment." Where do you live, Larry?"

"I've got a little apartment in Hollywood. On North Sycamore."

"Can I drop over? It'll be better that way."

"Why — sure." I gave her the number. She said she'd make it within an hour.

5.

I went to work energetically straightening up the room. My frame of mind had done a flip-flop in the last minute. There was a tingle of excitement in my veins I hadn't known since I was a high school kid.

When I opened the door she came right into my arms. There was a hungry feel to her lips, and her nails dug tracks up my side.

"Miss me terribly, Larry?"

I helped her out of her coat. "What do you think?"

"I want to hear you say it."

I said it.

She was on the divan now, explaining. "There wasn't a thing I could do. He came over to the hotel early in the morning, said something important had developed and we had to fly to Houston right away." A sigh did wonderful things to the yellow angora slip-over. "God, I don't know what you've done to me, but not seeing you made me miserable."

"That'll give you a rough idea of how I felt."

"I know, sweet." She broke out a smile. "You can buy me a drink now. Just to celebrate our homecoming."

I thought that was a good idea. I went to the kitchen and whipped up a pair.

Later when I went back for a refill, she called, "Mind if I play some of your records?"

"Go right ahead." When I returned with the glasses, she was curled up against one end of the divan. She had kicked off her suede pumps. *You Made Me Love You* was spinning on my turntable, and the volume was edged down low.

She patted the vacant area of her cushion. I sat down and for about a minute we sipped our drinks silently. Then she took my hand and ran caterpillar fingers over it.

The dark luminous eyes were searching. "What are you thinking, Larry?"

I held her glance. "I'm thinking, if only you weren't Bancroft's wife."

The fingers went to my cheek. Her other hand reached around and felt for the switch on the end table lamp. The room went dark. Her breath was warm, intense against my ear. "Tonight I'm no one's wife. I'm just a woman."

From across the floor came the high-pitched wail of a cornet.

6.

It went on that way for the next couple of months. On and off. Sometimes she had to join Bancroft on those damn trips of his. There were other times when she had to stick close to the family fireside. The four firesides he had in that big mansion out in Bel Air. The longer the interval between visits, the closer we felt when we got together.

One thing I was beginning to notice. She was tensing up more. There were flashes of that brooding, too. We never varied the meeting place. It was always that close-cropped apartment of mine. Except for an occasional drive we never went out. No bars, no public places. Evelyn was afraid we might bump into a friend of Bancroft.

Once, when she was scanning a travel magazine, she looked up and said, "Ever been to Europe, Larry?"

"Yeah. All expenses paid, too. Just happened to pick the wrong years. Forty-three to forty-five."

"Be wonderful if we could travel together, wouldn't it? Buenos Aires, Paris, Algiers —"

I knew what was eating her. I kidded, "Sure. I could bring along my samples. Maybe the Arabs are using asphalt tile in their tents —"

"I'm serious, Larry." She flipped the magazine aside and got to her feet. She went over to the window, peering out at the gloomy red haze that usually blankets Hollywood at night. "This kind of life is no good for us. Not the way we feel about each other. I want to be with you all the time. Not just sneak in and sneak out like a petty thief."

I took a long breath to reinforce myself. I finally pushed out the words. "Why don't you divorce him? We'll get married."

The delicate oval of a face came around slowly. "I want to marry you more than anything in the world." There was a vague smile. "But there's no point in divorcing Julian."

"I don't get it."

Her lip curled an invitation. "Come here, sweet." I moved over. She ran hands languidly up my chest. "How much will you make this year?"

"Well — I could hit seven thousand —."

"Seven thousand. That'll leave us just enough to travel to Catalina."

I flushed, "Okay. So I don't have a million —."

Her fingers pressed against my mouth. "Shhhh. Maybe you will have. If you listen to me, maybe you'll have five million."

"*Five — ?*"

Evelyn's eyes gripped mine while that sank in. A big cavity opened in my stomach. Big enough to sail the Queen Mary through. She didn't have to draw any pictures.

Funny though, how quick that hole filled up. Here I was, face to face with it. The thing that had always been so remote to me. That you read about in the screaming headlines. That you shake your head over, and sound off with righteous indignation when some stupid crumb pulls it off in your community. Only right now it didn't seem stupid. Maybe it was her nearness, or the strange light behind those dark eyes that burned deep into me.

But right now, it seemed logical as hell.

When she sensed it had taken root, her head went to my chest, and her body compressed against mine. "We're entitled to it, darling. We're young. We're lovers. Life has substance for us. All money means to him, is a means of making more money."

I said, against her hair, "But how can we get away with it?"

"I'll figure it out, sweet. Now that I know how you feel. I'll figure it out."

7.

It took her less than two days. The phone rang while I was pouring my breakfast coffee.

"Larry, he's flying to Reno day after tomorrow."

"That sounds like a lonesome week-end for me."

"You'll see me. I'll be sick and tell him to go ahead. I'll drive up the following day. You'll drive up, too, Larry. This Friday."

"But a big account—"

"This is bigger. This is *it*, darling. Now just do what I say."

I got the Chevvy out of the apartment garage at six-thirty, Friday morning. We met on the highway just out of San Fernando. She was driving a tomato-red Lincoln. I was to tail her up the Owens Valley road. To maintain contact she'd park and wait two miles beyond certain towns along the route. She stressed the importance of our not being seen together on this trip.

I lost her once leaving Lancaster, but she was waiting when I put Mojave behind me. After that it was a lot easier. Desert all the way and mighty few cars. It was close to ten-thirty when she flagged me down and indicated a dirt cut-off. We turned into it and parked near a dry arroyo.

"Hungry, darling?" She was unlocking the luggage compartment.

My arm went around the firm waist. "Yeah. For a lot of things."

She kissed me lightly. "Right now suppose we confine it to food." The door was up. She reached in and handed me a large hamper. In a couple of minutes she had a delicious picnic lunch spread out on a checkered cloth. A couple of lazy clouds leaned against a peak of the High Sierras. Otherwise the vivid desert sky was unflecked. The intense July heat was still a couple of hours away. There was a nice holiday feel to the whole picture.

It was hard to believe the destination of this trip was murder.

She didn't mention the subject until we were stowing away the dishes. "It's going to be easy, Larry. I guess you know I have a pilot's license."

I nodded.

She went on, "When we've taken care of him at the ranch, we'll place him in the plane and I'll fly it to a spot where Julian and I once made a forced landing. Back of the Mono craters. Know where they are?"

"Sure. Past the road to June Lake."

"That's right. Just ideal for our purpose." There was a peculiar radiance in her eyes. "Hardly anyone goes into that country at this time of the year. Even if they find him, it's going to look as though he died in a crash."

I didn't like that last part. "But what happens to you?"

"I rush into your waiting arms, sweet, and we live happily ever after."

"Give it to me straight, Evelyn. This is no kidding matter."

"Now, now. Don't push me. Besides, I want to sustain your interest. Next sequence when we get to that spot in Mono."

Amusement crinkled her mouth. This could have been a scavenger hunt. I had to give her credit.

She was doing a good job of keeping our nerves in line, on this leg of the outing.

8.

It was early afternoon when we saw the group of gray cones rising to the east of the highway. We turned into a country road that skirted the flank of the volcanoes, then she found a trail that headed for the arid country behind them. Three miles in, we came to a stop. We hadn't seen another car since leaving the state highway.

"This is it, Larry. Isn't it perfect?"

It was flat and large enough to land a plane, and it was screened on three sides by towering deposits of lava and volcanic rock. Our feet crunched in the layer of fine pumice. It looked as bleak and desolate as one of those old woodcuts of Hell.

I said, "I'm beginning to see what you have in mind."

She explained her plan. "If we keep our heads, we can't miss. When it's . . . over . . . you drive ahead and meet me here. I bring the plane down, slow it, then jump off. When it hits those rock piles it's bound to look as though Julian crashed. We drive away and no one will ever know I was the pilot of his plane." Her fingers laced with mine, and she looked up at me, the way a kid does seeking appreciation.

I had to admit it was a cozy blueprint she'd worked out. It could be weeks before they spotted the wreckage of Bancroft's plane in this burned out region. Meantime, she'd play the distressed wife of the

missing millionaire. All we had to do was wait it out.

On the balance of the trip north there was no point in our maintaining contact. The arrangements were for me to stop at a small hotel in Reno, under an assumed name.

I phoned her at the Riverview the next day, shortly after ten.

Her tone was guarded. "May I call you later?"

I gave her the number of my hotel. I added, "Ask for Mr. Munsey."

The call came through a half hour later. "I'm calling from outside, darling. The waiter was up in the room with my breakfast."

"Have you seen 'J'?"

"We had dinner last night. I have it all arranged. Told him I'm going to shop around for carpeting to redecorate the house. Then I'll drive out to the ranch. You wait for my call, then you come out, too. It will probably be later in the day when his caretaker has left. The fellow always takes off Saturday, and doesn't return until Monday."

"Same name?"

"Yes, Mr. Munsey. And you're with the Acme Carpeting Company. Right?"

"Right."

Three kisses came over the wire in rapid succession. She was still playing it like a game.

You couldn't say the same for my mood. I had the feeling once before, back in '43. When shallow ocean water slapped against the bottom of our landing barge. This was close up now. Tonight probably. I stayed in the dreary room, chain-smoked, and got myself wound up like a two-dollar clock. When the phone rang four hours later, I sprang at it.

"Mr. Munsey?" Just the right inflection.

"That's right."

"This is Mrs. Julian Bancroft. You know, I was in to see you today about carpeting for our ranch house."

"Oh, yes."

"I realize it's short notice, but I wonder if you might be able to drive out this evening with your samples and give us an estimate? You see, Mr. Bancroft has to leave town early in the morning, and we would like to take care of this matter before he leaves."

"Glad to, Mrs. Bancroft. Just what time would you like me to call?"

"Eight-thirty, if it's convenient. You won't have trouble finding it. There are two huge coach lamps at the gate." She gave me further driving directions.

I felt better now.

9.

It was a twenty-minute run from Reno, out where the money-boys have those lush ranches nestling against the mountains. I could see right off he had one of the biggest layouts in the region. It was like

driving into a cemetery. Moonlight filtered through the elms that lined the gravel lane. The lane seemed almost as long as the highway I had just left. I got to thinking what a lucky guy Bancroft was to own a deal like this.

Then the humor of the thing hit me, if you could call it that. Tabbing a man lucky who was going to be cold dead in another hour.

The lane finally turned and I saw the house. It was a long rambling affair and there were signs of remodeling. She answered my ring.

"Won't you please come in?" There was a nice 'lady-of-the-house' smile. I recognized Bancroft immediately. He was seated in a big wing chair near the fireplace. A topcoat neatly draped over the arm of another chair, and the small piece of airplane luggage alongside, gave the impression of a man prepared to take off shortly on a trip. She led me over to him. "This is Mr. Munsey, dear. The carpet man. He was kind enough to come out here with his samples."

I placed my two sample bags on the floor and we shook hands. He seemed a little older and a little smaller than my previous glimpse of him. He also had a dignified courteous way about him that wasn't going to make things easier for me. I think Evelyn spotted the fleeting reaction on my face.

She got right down to cases. "What are your ideas for a room this size, Mr. Munsey?"

I spread some of my large swatches on a table. He came over and felt each one that appealed to him. They both finally agreed with my recommendation of a broadloom. I went through the business of taping off the floor area, then Evelyn suggested we go over the rest of the house. Bancroft asked to be excused for a moment, he'd join us shortly. She led me to an empty bedroom that had been recently repapered.

"Right here. First chance you see." Her whisper was hard against my ear.

I opened the other case. Her eyes sparkled approval when I let her have a quick look at the section of pipe hidden under the samples. Before we left L. A., I had covered it with a thin green felt.

We heard him approaching down the uncarpeted hall. I was placing swatches on the floor when he stepped into the room.

Evelyn was on one knee, examining a few that seemed to have caught her fancy. She reached up for his sleeve. "Come here, dear. What do you think?"

The man stooped and started feeling their texture. I eased behind them, the way a salesman would do at this point.

He started to say, "This old rose seems to go nicely —"

I brought the pipe down across the side of his head. I weigh one hundred and eighty, and I used to wrestle at the 'Y'. I put everything I had into it, but he must have

moved slightly. He was still conscious when he hit the floor.

"No — no —" The pitiful moan came up to me, pushed down into my stomach, tore it apart.

She saw what was happening to me, reached for my trouser and yanked it.

"Larry!" Her finger riveted the air furiously in the direction of his head.

The stinging command unfroze me. I fought the torturing resistance that had suddenly sprung up within me, and brought the lead pipe down once more. This time it was full on target. Blood matted the grey hair, spilled across his cheek.

I heard the pipe drop dully to the floor. After that, the only sound was my heart trying to break out of my body.

After a while I felt her gentle hands on my face. They brought it close to hers. "It's all over now, darling." Her lips glided soothingly over mine. An arm went around my waist. She walked me into the living room, over to a big easy chair.

"Just relax a while. I'll fix some drinks. That'll help."

The double bourbon and water did help. That and the dull spent feeling that had taken over now.

She had lifted his topcoat and was reaching for the overnight bag. "Just one more little job, and we're all through."

"Sure. I'm okay now." I smiled in her direction. She was an amazing girl. I felt a little ashamed.

"Everything's working in our favor, Larry. He's all packed for an early getaway to Bakersfield. They phoned him today and tipped him off that if he shows up in time tomorrow morning, he can put over a big deal. It was almost a mania with Julian, putting over a successful deal. So you see, even the trip he's going to make is anticipated."

"Honey, you've sure got the touch."

She laughed lightly, then told me to drive around to the rear. When I joined her later in the bedroom she had already covered his soggy head with a cloth. We carried the body outside to my car where I had previously opened the luggage compartment. Evelyn tossed in the bag and topcoat, then we lifted her late husband. It was just a short drive to the wide clearing at the north end of the ranch. Moonlight glinted on the blades of the twin-engine job and supplied us with a reasonable amount of illumination. Once a dog bayed in the distance. Otherwise there was no sign of life in the area. But I worked under a feeling of anxiety, and there was a sharp sense of relief when I finally maneuvered Bancroft into the cabin of his plane. Tossing the coat across his lap, I dropped quickly to the ground. We drove back to the house.

10.

Standing before the fireplace, her body folded into mine. For the first

time tonight that steel facing of hers was gone, and hot blood was back in her veins. "Oh, darling, darling. We've got the world now. Just you and me."

The world. For one drawn-out quivering moment it was in my arms. The sum of all my dreams. The hazy rolling-over dream that would never stay put. Then reality nudged me.

I said, "Maybe I better get started. We don't want to leave him —"

"Don't worry. Plenty of time for that. You get yourself some sleep." She edged me over to the big couch. She sat at one end and made me lie down, my head in her lap. Relaxing finger tips stroked under my ears. Then I slipped into deep untroubled darkness.

It was still dark when I woke up. There was the smell and sound of percolating coffee. She was smiling above me. "Four o'clock, darling. Time to get up and milk the cows."

A half hour later she stood at the side of my car, saying, "I'll leave here at six-thirty. That way, we should both get there at pretty much the same time." She leaned in for a long kiss.

II.

My nerves kicked up again when the lonely road worked into the high shadowy timber. It was like driving through a forest of accusing fingers. I guess it was the idea of being back on the same road. Two days ago I was headed north. Just another normal guy. Taxpayer. A number on a social security card. Now I was making the return trip.

Yeah, same road. Only this time I was a murderer.

Then the fragrance of her hair rolled in on the early morning, and the brand of her lips on mine dissolved the chill. The first sampling of dawn helped, too. It gave a pallid tinge to the vapor rising from the surface of Topaz Lake, as I rolled down the grade past the state line. Beyond I saw the lights of the agricultural checking station. All cars crossing into California have to stop here. A family in a Ford with Kansas plates was parked in front of me as I pulled up under the long shed. Their pile of opened luggage was laid out on the table alongside, and the driver picked up each piece and returned it to his car as the inspector finished with it.

While I was waiting a highway patrol car drove in at the other end, and I watched one of the state cops get out and stroll to the rest room. Static and an occasional routine call drifted over to me from their two-way radio. Apparently all was peace and calm along the highway. My own calm at the moment rather surprised me. In a way, this was my first test. Now that I was practically staring down the mouth of the law, I didn't seem at all worried. The thought produced a flash feeling of exhilaration.

The Ford pulled away. The in-

spector stepped in front of my car, made a note of the license, then came around to my window.

"Good morning. Where are you coming from, please?"

"Reno."

He made another note. "And how long have you been out of the state?"

"Just a few days."

He glanced cursorily around the interior of the coupe. "Are you bringing in any fruit, seeds, or plants?"

I kidded, "From Reno? Say, I'm lucky to bring back my shirt."

He grinned understandingly. He was a pleasant enough young guy. "Can I see what you have in back now?"

"Sure. Glad to."

Opening the door I noticed the highway cop was idling in front of the office now. He was dragging on a cigarette.

I went around to the rear, unlocked the compartment and pulled out the sample kits, placing them on the adjacent table. I had just started to lift my overnight case when I glimpsed something that froze me and sent a fist thudding inside my abdomen. Another bag was in the far corner where I had tossed it last night. Bancroft's bag. The one I had overlooked in my anxiety to get his body aboard his plane.

I snapped out of my arrested motion and pushed my bag across to the inspector. He opened it, ran his hand briefly, impersonally through the contents, then looked up. He was on the other side of the table, standing diagonally to the rear-end of the Chevvy.

He said, "Anything else?"

A flood of torturing indecision roared against my brain, all in the second or two before I had to come up with an answer. My first instinct was to say no. But there was always the chance he may have spotted the other piece of luggage. That would make for unnecessary suspicion. Besides, what the hell was I worried about. The inspector was only interested in bug-bearing plants, and things like that. Another suit of pajamas and some more toilet articles weren't going to get a rumble out of him.

I answered, "Yeah. One more."

I turned and brought out the expensive case. While he was snapping the locks, I tried to be casual about returning the sample kits to my car. Reaching for my own valise I suddenly realized the inspector was studying me furtively, and that he hadn't closed Bancroft's bag. I also noticed that the highway patrolman was no longer leaning against the office wall. He was approaching the table, and the other cop was already out of his car. This fellow must have summoned them.

My nerve ends were straining as though they'd tumbled out for a red alert. There was trouble here. I could spot it in the way the guy stalled until the others joined him. It was my being kept in the dark that

really hurt. The upraised lid of Bancroft's bag made it impossible for me to learn about its contents.

The first cop was on the other side of the table now. The inspector seemed to be lifting a folded garment that had been placed on top. There was just a flicker of reaction in the newcomer's cool eyes as he glanced into the bag, but it was enough to tense every muscle in my body.

His glance shifted to me. He said quietly, too quietly. "What line you in, mister?"

"Floor coverings."

"You generally give out samples?"

"Sometimes. Why?"

"I'd like to be around next time you pass 'em out." He turned the case so that I could see what it contained. I enjoyed a fragment of relief when I saw the folded foulard dressing gown.

I managed to smile, "I don't get your point, officer."

Very carefully, like lifting a shroud for a last look at the dead, he pulled back the robe. "This help any?"

Sudden sickness lumped in my throat, and panic started burgeoning. I was staring at a fortune in paper money. The neat packages, mostly in large denominations, filled the bottom of Bancroft's bag.

He fingered a few of the bundles. "That's a lot of pin-money, boy. Fifty-grand, I'd say roughly. Any explanations?"

Sure. There was an explanation. It was racing through my mind, only I couldn't give it. A successful operator like Bancroft wouldn't miss a trick in closing a deal. He'd been all set to fly down to Bakersfield and put cash on the barrelhead. A matter of business technique he hadn't confided in his wife.

The other cop, a tall bleak looking man, had been examining some legal papers withdrawn from a pocket in the overnight bag. He squinted at me. "You a friend of Mr. Bancroft's?"

I just stared empty-eyed at the money.

The first cop came from behind the table, frisked me, glanced at the identification in my wallet, then led me to the little office. He motioned me into a chair.

Outside I could hear the taller man calling Reno on his short-wave. The electric clock over the door showed seventeen past five. Evelyn wasn't due to take off until six-thirty. In twenty minutes a squad car would roll into the place, and a Reno cop was going to ask for Mr. Bancroft.

Leaning against a desk the highway officer watched me as I searched my pockets for a cigarette. When he realized I had none, he offered his own pack.

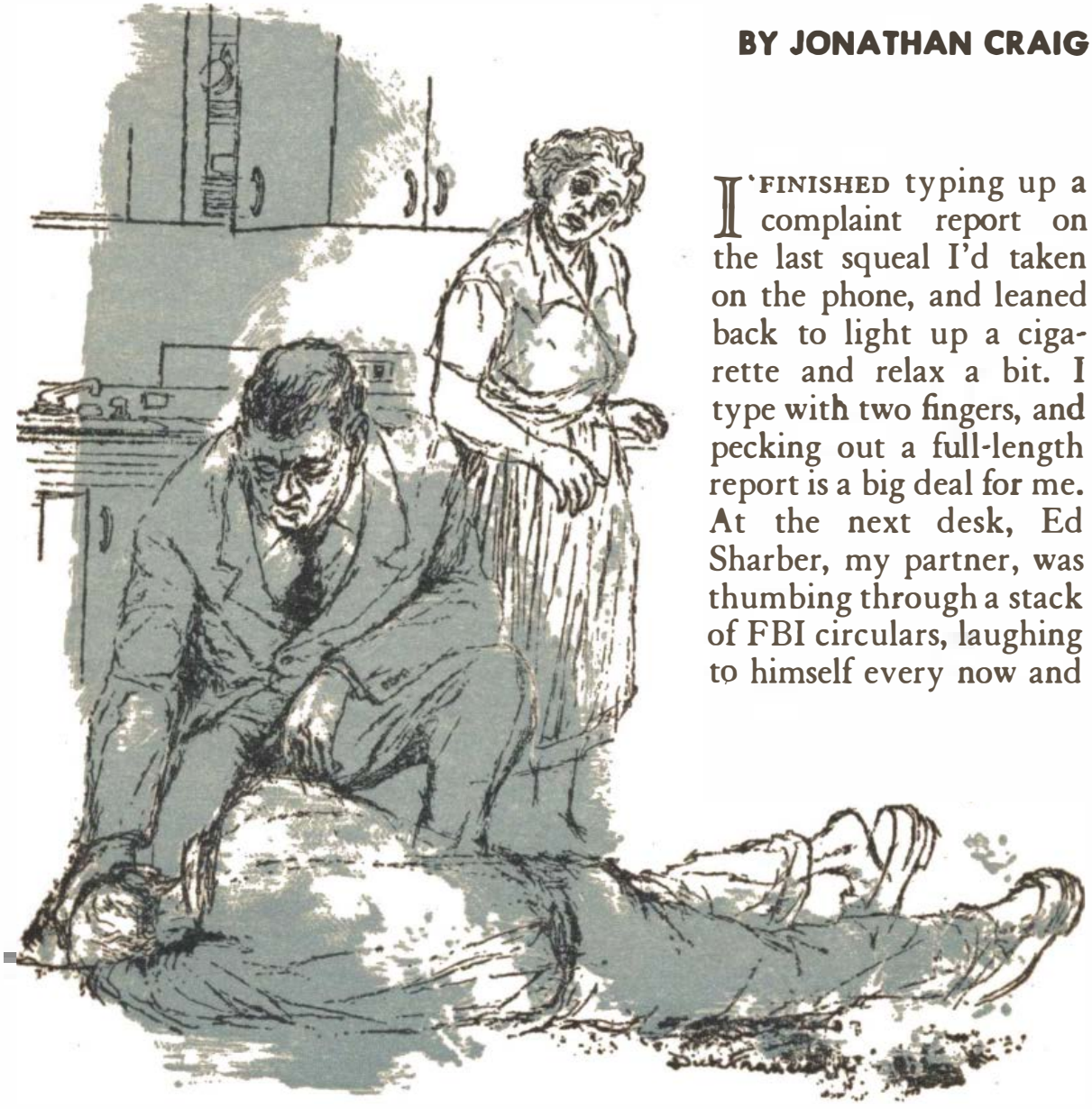
"Thanks."

Then the irony of this moment hit me, and I wanted to laugh. Laugh until every bone and joint ached. It was like a final curtain coming down on the same note that opened the play.

I was out of cigarettes again.

Mr. Munger was dead. It would have looked like suicide, except that the gun had disappeared.

Night Watch



BY JONATHAN CRAIG

I'FINISHED typing up a complaint report on the last squeal I'd taken on the phone, and leaned back to light up a cigarette and relax a bit. I type with two fingers, and pecking out a full-length report is a big deal for me. At the next desk, Ed Sharber, my partner, was thumbing through a stack of FBI circulars, laughing to himself every now and

then when he came across an especially vicious-looking mug.

I grinned at him. "What's so funny?" I asked. "You're uglier than any of those guys, Ed."

He nodded. "I can't deny it. But I still look like a human being, which is a damn sight more than anybody can say for you."

I thought about it. "Yeah," I said. "That's true."

"To be real honest with you," Ed said, "if I had a puss like yours, I'd —"

The phone rang again. It was a Friday night, Ed's and my regular night to cop squeals in the squad room, and business had been pretty good. It was still only a quarter of two, and between us we'd taken four beefs since we checked in at midnight. None of them, however, had been homicides.

I lifted the phone. "Homicide Squad," I said. "Sergeant Curran speaking."

It was a woman's voice, middle-aged, very excited. "Someone — someone's killed Mr. Munger."

I reached for a pencil. "What's the address?"

"Eight-oh-three East Fifty-first Street. Somebody —"

"That an apartment house?"

"— has shot him. I —"

"What's the room or apartment number, ma'am?"

"— just got here, and . . . Oh. Yes, it's an apartment house."

"And the number of the apartment?"

"Eleven."

"You there now?"

"Yes."

"Stay there. What's your name?"

She hesitated a moment. "Frances Wirt. Miss Frances Wirt."

"All right, Miss Wirt. We're on our way. Don't touch anything. Understand? Don't touch the body, or anything else. And don't let anyone else touch anything."

"There's no one else here."

"Fine. Don't let anyone else in till we get there."

I hung up and nodded to Ed. "That's the end of the siesta," I said. "Some guy named Munger, over on East Fifty-first."

Ed strapped on his gun rig and got into his jacket while I scribbled a call chit for the squad commander. It would tell him where we were, and where to send the tech crew and the assistant M.E. Then I got into my own rig and jacket, dropped the chit off with the commander, and Ed and I went downstairs to pick up a couple of patrolmen and check out an RMP car.

The woman who opened the apartment door for us was plump and gray-haired. You could have called her motherly looking, except for the way the skin sagged beneath her eyes with the long-time alcoholic's droop. But if she'd been hitting the jug tonight, seeing a dead man must have scared her sober.

"He — he's out in the kitchen," she told us.

I left one patrolman at the door and took Ed and the other patrolman out to the kitchen with me.

Munger was wearing a pale yellow sport shirt, dark slacks, and loafers. He was about fifty, I guessed, thin and partly bald. He was lying on his left side, facing the doorway. There was a bullet wound about half an inch above the left eyebrow. I bent down and looked at the back of his head. There was another bullet hole there, considerably larger than the one in front. The odd thing about the wound was that the skin around the hole over the eyebrow — the point of entrance — was charred and ragged, which meant it was a contact wound; and homicides in which a gun is pressed directly against a victim's face at the moment of firing are so rare that I could count on the fingers of one hand the number of times I'd heard of them.

I took a quick hinge at the walls and the floor, but there was no sign of the slug. Meanwhile, Ed Sharber was making a search of the entire kitchen. I told the patrolman the slug had gone all the way through Munger's head, and asked him to make a thorough search of all walls and the floor.

Ed looked at me and shrugged. "Nothing here that can mean anything, Barney," he said. "No struggle; that's for sure. The guy's hair isn't even out of place."

"Yeah," I said. "Well, let's talk to the woman." We walked back into the living room.

"What was Munger's first name, Miss Wirt?" I asked.

She thought a moment. "Roy."

"What was your connection with him?"

"I'm the maid."

Ed stepped close. "Kind of a funny time for the maid to be here, isn't it?"

"I don't know what's funny about it," she said. "I do it three times a week. Clean up Mr. Munger's apartment, I mean."

I pointed to the studio couch. "Maybe you'd like to sit down, Miss Wirt?"

She shook her head. "I don't need to."

"All right." I glanced about the apartment. Very lush, but still in good taste. "You say you clean up here three nights a week?"

"Yes, sir. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays."

"You always get here at the same time?"

"Most always. I was a little late tonight, but I usually get here about one-thirty."

"Mr. Munger works nights, does he?"

"Yes, sir. Lots of tenants in this building do. They're show people, mostly. They have to sleep in the daytime, and that's why they'd rather have their maid service done at night." She'd done a good job of collecting herself, I reflected as I took out my notebook and pencil. She was now fairly calm, and she even managed what was almost a

smile. "I got lots of show people — some of them real big names, too. I do four apartments on this floor, and two more up on the fifth."

"Mr. Munger in show business, too?"

"No. He owns — owned a bar over on Lexington."

"You know the name?"

"Let's see . . . Oh, yes. The Four O'Clock Club."

"How long were you here before you found the body, Miss Wirt?"

"No time at all. I always do the kitchen first thing, and —"

The door buzzer sounded, and the patrolman I'd stationed there let in the assistant M.E. and the tech crew. I asked Ed to take them out in the kitchen and get them started, and then I turned back to Miss Wirt.

"Do you know of anyone you think might have done this?" I asked. "You ever hear anyone threaten him? Did he ever say anything that might give you an idea?"

She thought a moment. "Well . . . outside of Mrs. Munger herself, I . . ." She broke off, frowning a little.

"Please go on, Miss Wirt."

"Well, she came over here one night, Mrs. Munger did. I didn't even know there *was* a Mrs. Munger, till that night. Mr. Munger had come home while I was still here. He said he didn't feel well. About half an hour later, Mrs. Munger came. She started right in cursing him and threatening him —"

"Threatening him?"

"Yes. She said if he didn't start paying her support money — they were separated, you know — when it was due, she was going to have one of her men friends do something terrible to him. I've never seen anyone so mad as she was. She kept trying to hit him with her handbag, but Mr. Munger didn't get very excited at all."

"Was that all there was to it, the support money?"

"Well, Mrs. Munger did say something about Mr. Munger robbing a different cradle every night."

"You ever see anyone else here?"

"No."

"You sure, Miss Wirt?"

"Well, I knew he'd had company sometimes, of course. I mean, there'd be glasses with lipstick on them — things like that."

"I see. Can you think of anything else that might help us?"

She shook her head slowly. "I don't think so."

"All right, Miss Wirt. Would you mind staying here for a while?"

"I've still got another apartment to do . . ."

"I hate to break up your schedule," I said. "But it's necessary."

"Yes . . . yes, I guess it is." She sat down on the studio couch and I went back into the kitchen.

"Any luck, Ed?" I asked.

"Not a hell of a lot, Barney. We found the slug, though."

"Let's see it." He handed it to me. It was pretty well flattened out, but it looked like a thirty-two.

"Well, at least we know we're probably looking for a revolver," I said. "No steel jacket on this baby."

"That's right," Ed said. "The way plain lead slugs foul an automatic, nobody but a damn fool would use anything but steel jackets." He grinned. "But of course our guy might have been a damn fool."

"He was," I said. I watched the tech boys working with their tape measures and chalk and cameras and powders. It was the best tech crew in New York, this gang, and they'd worked together so long that they went through their routine with no more than an occasional grunt at one another. With our town averaging five thousand homicides a year, they'd had a lot of experience. I handed the slug to one of them, and he put it in a pill box and coded the cover.

The M.E. looked up at me. "I'm all through here, Barney," he said. "I'll post him at Bellevue tomorrow about ten o'clock." He stripped off his rubber gloves and went over to the kitchen sink to wash his hands.

"How long's he been dead, Doc?" I asked.

"I'd say about three hours. Rigor mortis has just begun in the face and jaws, and there's none in the neck or further down. Taking everything into consideration, three hours is pretty close."

We walked with him to the hall door, and then I went over to the studio couch to ask Miss Wirt if she knew where we could get in touch with the dead man's wife. She said she didn't know, but that she had remembered something else. She said that, on another occasion when Mr. Munger had been home while she cleaned the apartment, she had heard him make a telephone call. He had asked someone — maybe a room clerk, she thought — to speak to a Mr. Hap Tully. She had remembered the name because it was so unusual that, afterwards, it kept coming back to her mind.

I wrote Tully's name in my notebook, then looked up the number of the Four O'Clock Club in the directory and asked for whoever was in charge. I talked to a Mr. Corbin, who told me he hadn't seen Mrs. Roy Munger for several months, but that he'd heard she was dancing at The Flame, on Fifty-Second Street. Next, I called the precinct and asked the lieutenant in charge to send someone over to The Flame and bring Mrs. Munger back to the precinct with him for questioning. I asked that they find out whether she could account for her time during the last four hours — which would give us an hour's leeway on the time the M.E. had said was the probable time of death — and leave further questioning to me.

The tech boys were ready to go by then, so I got Miss Wirt's phone number and address, and asked the boys to drop her off on their way back to the station house. Miss Wirt assured me she'd be available if we should need her again.

Then Ed and I got down to the hard work. We went over every room in the apartment, very carefully, of course, but working as fast as we could. We found nothing till we got to the bedroom. There, in the bottom drawer of the bureau, we found a square steel box, a little smaller than a cigar box. While Ed, who was a better locksmith than a lot of professionals, got out his pocket lock kit and went to work on the lock, I found something else. In the next to the bottom drawer I counted six pairs of nylons of three different sizes, all still sealed in their Cellophane envelopes. In addition to the stockings, there were three lipsticks, ranging from pale to dark; four cards of bobby pins, in gold, brown, red, and black; two toothbrushes, still in their glass display tubes; and a dozen or so small photographs, all of girls, none of whom could possibly have been more than fifteen or sixteen. A couple could easily have been less. All the girls were dressed, though one of them was smiling coyly into the camera in a raised-skirt pose.

I called Ed over to look. "Some guys really believe in being prepared," I said. "It looks like Munger was ready for just about anything."

"Yeah," Ed said, going through the photographs. "Well, you've got to say one thing for him. The guy was sure fond of children. These girls aren't much more than babies."

"They'd probably give you an argument there."

"Maybe so. They grow up pretty fast these days, all right."

"You notice they were all taken in this apartment," I said. "There's that studio couch. It's in every one of them."

"Maybe he took them for trophies," Ed said.

"Uh-huh. You think you can break that box?"

"Sure. I could damn near do it with one of those bobby pins." He went back to the box, worked on it another thirty seconds, and then pushed hard on the sides. The lock snapped open.

Ed shook his head slowly. "I'll be a son of a bitch," he said. "Take a look at that, Barney."

I went over and looked into the box. Lying side by side on what looked like a velvet cushion were two hypodermic syringes. There was also a silver tablespoon with its handle bent almost back on itself, a two-foot piece of rubber tubing, and eight small white envelopes.

"Maybe that explains why the children loved him so," I said.

"Yeah." Barney sifted a little of the white powder from one of the envelopes to the palm of his hand and touched his tongue to it.

"Heroin?" I asked.

He nodded.

"Did you look at Munger's arms and legs while you were in the kitchen?"

"Sure. There weren't any marks. If he was an addict, he sure wasn't taking it through his skin."

"Funny," I said.

"Well, maybe he was a pipe man. Maybe . . . Hey! Wait a minute!" He'd pulled back a corner of the velvet, revealing two slender brown cigarettes. When he removed the cushion completely, we found the bottom of the box covered with them. They were in all sizes, all the way from the match-thin ones the weedheads call slivers, to the heavy, thick ones they call bombers.

"So that's it," Ed said. "The guy probably stuck to marijuana himself, and kept this other for the kids."

I went out to the living room to call Moss Ward at the Narcotics Squad on Broom Street. Ward said he'd be over in twenty minutes.

Moss was as good as his word. We filled him in on the murder, watched him while he went through the photographs to see if he recognized any of the girls as known addicts, and then I asked him if he'd ever heard of anyone named Hap Tully. I explained that Munger's maid had heard a heated phone conversation between Munger and Tully.

"Hell yes, I've heard of him," Moss said. "We've pulled him in maybe a dozen times. We could never make anything stick, though."

"We'll probably have something on him at the precinct then," I said. "What is he, a pusher?"

"Yeah. A big one."

I looked at Ed. "I guess we'd better get over to the precinct and talk to Mrs. Munger."

"Okay if I stick around a while, Sergeant?" Moss asked. "Maybe I can come up with something for our outfit."

"Make yourself at home," I said. "If you turn up anything, give us a call over at the precinct."

"Sure."

Ed and I left one of the patrolmen as a stake-out, told him to be sure to get a receipt for Munger's body from the ambulance attendants when they came to pick it up, and left the apartment.

When Ed and I got back to the squad room, we found Detective Vic Ardello sitting behind my desk and a very tall, very angry red-head standing beside it.

Vic unwound from the chair and nodded toward the woman. "Here she is, Barney. I asked her to sit down, but she didn't think much of the idea." He grinned. "Her story checks out okay."

"Thanks, Vic," I said.

"Next time send me for a wildcat," he said. "Well, I got reports to make out. See you." He crossed to his own desk and took the cover off his typewriter.

"Listen, Ed," I said. "See if we've got a package on Hap Tully, will you?" When he had started off toward the file cabinets, I took a closer look at Mrs. Roy Munger. She was a very attractive woman now, and fifteen years ago, when she'd been about twenty, she had probably been beautiful.

"Are you the one responsible for this?" she asked.

"That's right, Mrs. Munger," I said, making it friendly. "I'm Sergeant Curran."

"I wouldn't give a goddam if you were a general. What're you trying to do — play God?"

"If you'll just take it easy, ma'am, I'll —"

She took a quick step toward me. "Listen, you cheap cop. You just *think* you can pull something like this! I know some of the biggest lawyers in this town, and judges, too, by God, and the first thing I'm going to do when I get out of here is sue you for false arrest!"

"That'll be about enough, Mrs. Munger," I said. "No one's arresting you. No one's violated any of your rights. We just want to talk to you, that's all."

She glared at me a moment, chewing at her lower lip with the sharpest looking white teeth I'd ever seen. Detective Ardello would have told her why he was bringing her in, I knew; that was S.O.P. in situations like this. So she knew her husband had been murdered, and yet there was no visible reaction other than anger. It wouldn't have meant anything, except that I could sense it was real. She was furious; and there wasn't even the tiniest odor of phoniness about it.

"All right, Sergeant — or whatever you are — let's get on with it," she said bitterly. "What do you want from me?"

"You don't take your husband's death too hard, Mrs. Munger," I said.

"Don't kid yourself. I take it hard, all right. The son of a bitch owed me over eight hundred dollars in support money."

I nodded. "I understand you and Mr. Munger had quite an argument about that one night . . ."

"We had an argument about it a lot of nights. I damn near had him in jail a couple of times, only his lawyer conned me out of it." She paused. "Who told you about that?"

"Never mind that now, Mrs. Munger. We were also told you threatened your husband, that you said if he didn't pay you that support money you'd have one of your men friends do something to him."

"Now I know who told you. It was that lard-butt maid Roy had. She —"

"About the threat, Mrs. Munger," I said. "What about it?"

"Nothing. I was just hot at him, for God's sake." Then she got it. "I see what you're driving at. You think I got someone to kill him."

I didn't tell her she was a bright girl. I didn't say anything at all.

"Well, I didn't," she said. "Not that I had anything against the idea, you understand. But why should I want him dead, when he might kick in with that dough he owed me?"

"How about insurance, money left to you in a will — things like that?"

"Don't make me laugh. He didn't

have a pot. Every dime he made went for San Quentin quail and happy powder."

"We'll check the insurance and the will angle," I said.

"Do that . . . and to hell with you."

"Just take it a little easier, please," I said. "Do you know anything — anything at all — that might help us solve your husband's murder, Mrs. Munger?"

"No. Big N, little o — no! You understand? *No!*"

I'd been watching her carefully. One of the first things you learn as a detective is that, perhaps nine times out of ten, you don't really need a polygraph to tell when a person is lying. The theory of the mechanical lie detector is based on certain body changes brought about by lying, and some of these changes can be observed just as easily with the eye as with the machine. It's almost impossible for a suspect to control all these changes, and completely impossible to sustain that control even when it exists. While Mrs. Munger had been denying any knowledge of the crime, I had watched for blushing, change in the activity of the sweat pores, nervousness, and any indication that her throat was dry.

There was nothing there but anger.

I glanced at the wall clock behind my desk. It was ten minutes till five. "I guess that'll be all for right now, Mrs. Munger," I said. "If you'll wait around a few moments, I'll get someone to take you by the morgue. Then they'll take you home."

"The morgue? What in hell for? I don't want to see the bastard. He turned my stomach enough when he was *alive*, for God's sake."

"I'm sorry," I said. "We'd prefer that you identify the body."

"What for? Aren't you sure it's Roy?"

"I'll get someone to take you over," I said and walked across the squad room to the lieutenant's desk. I arranged for a detective to accompany Mrs. Munger to the morgue, and then take her home.

I'd started back to my desk when Ed Sharber came up with a yellow sheet in his hand.

"Sorry I took so long, Barney," he said. "Somebody had misfiled Hap Tully's sheet under Tolliver." He handed me the D.D. 24 form and grinned. "Probably did it myself."

I went back to my desk, passing Mrs. Munger on her way out with the detective who would take her to the morgue for a next-of-kin ID on Munger's body. If anything, she looked angrier than she had a few moments ago.

I sat down at my desk, called the all-night lunch room on the corner for a quart of coffee for Ed and me, and then sat back to think out where we were.

I scanned the form quickly.

I handed the D.D. 24 back to Ed. "See if you can get a line on this guy," I said.

PRISONER'S CRIMINAL RECORD

Number of Picture in Gallery:
NYC/9/61

NAME:	ALIAS:
Tully, Howard B.	Hap Tully, Max Talbot, Eddie Taylor

CRIMINAL RECORD (as far as known):
Tully convicted on 1st degree manslaughter, N. Y., 1931. Sentenced 5 to 10 yrs. Paroled with record good behavior 1935. Suspended sentence 1940, on Sullivan violation. Arrests, no convictions, 1942, 48, 49, 50, 53, possession and/or sale narcotics. Tully is well-educated, good dresser, glib talker and follows horse races around the country. Informers state he may be extortioner, but no N. Y. complaints on this.
Tully now thought to be connected with Louis Marchek in some phase of Marchek's narcotics activities. Periodic surveillance continued from 1950 to date of this report.

"Break?"

"He and Munger had some hot words on the phone," I said.

The more I thought about it, the more I saw we were almost nowhere. And that contact wound on Roy Munger's forehead was beginning to worry me. A contact wound on a man's forehead is something you don't see once in a blue moon, except with suicides, and this had been no suicide. The angle of the bullet and the missing gun had proved that. So what we had left was the fact that someone had pressed the muzzle of a revolver against Munger's forehead and pulled the trigger. It could have been done easily enough if Munger had been asleep in bed, or if his killer had knocked him out first. But that hadn't happened. Munger had been killed in the kitchen, with no sign of a struggle. It was hard to think of a man letting someone put a gun against his face without trying to do something about it, but I couldn't think of any way around it. It didn't make sense — but then, neither does murder.

Munger must have been quite a guy, I reflected. He'd apparently had a lot of girls visit him overnight at his apartment, as the feminine things we'd found in his bureau drawer attested, and his wife had said he'd gone broke on under-age girls and dope.

The coffee came, and I called for Ed to come and get his share of it. He was talking into his phone. After a moment he hung up and came over.

"I located him," he said wryly. "At least I located where he *was*."

"What's the score?"

"He was at a hotel on West Forty-Seventh, but he checked out."

"When?"

"Yesterday morning."

"How long had he stayed there?"

"About four months."

"Yeah. Well, if he was there that long maybe it's more than coincidence he moved out so soon before Munger slammed off?"

"Maybe so, maybe not. We'll see."

I got up. "Better drink some of that coffee while you have a chance, Ed," I said. "I'll take care of the All Points."

I left him sipping coffee and walked over to the teletype machines. I dictated the alarm directly to the operator, watching the blue letters forming across the paper.

GENERAL ALARM ALL PRECINCTS WATCH FOR HOWARD B. TULLY ALIAS HAP TULLY ALIAS MAX TALBOT ALIAS EDDIE TAYLOR WANTED FOR QUESTIONING RE MURDER TULLY MAY BE ARMED NOTIFY HOMICIDE NINTH PRECINCT IF APPREHENDED.

I went back to my desk to help Ed with the coffee.

The phone rang.

"Sergeant Cullan," I said.

"This is Ardello, Barney."

"Yeah, Vic. What's up?"

"I'm over at Roosevelt Receiving. We got an attempted suicide, and the guy will probably interest you a little. He says he killed your boy Munger."

And that's the way it goes sometimes. You should get used to such things after a while, I guess, but somehow you never do. You get so immersed in your investigation, so intent on putting a killer in the chair, that it's hard to accept the fact that your man has simply walked up to you, so to speak, and tapped you on the shoulder.

I walked over to the teletype machines and told the operator to put out a cancel on the alarm for Hap Tully, thinking how quickly a guy like Tully could change from a hot murder suspect to just absolutely nothing — just a guy who'd happened to be associated in some way with a man who later got himself murdered. Considering Munger, the association was undoubtedly unsavory, but it wasn't part of the murder picture, anyway.

There was almost no traffic on the streets at that time of morning. Ed and I made the receiving room in less than fifteen minutes.

Vic Ardello and a doctor met us and led us down a corridor.

"He'll recover," the doctor said. "Right now he thinks he's going to die."

"No chance of that, eh?" I asked.

"None at all."

"How'd he do it?"

"Revolver," Ardello said. "He must have changed his mind the same second he pulled the trigger. The slug went in at an angle and bounced off his skull. It took out a little bone, and knocked him out for a few minutes, but that's all."

"He's lost a lot of blood, though,"

the doctor said. "It'd be better if you didn't talk to him too long."

"What's his name?"

"Coleman. James Coleman."

We turned into a large room, asked the two nurses there to wait in the hall with the doctor, and then Ed and Vic and I went over to the bed.

Coleman was about forty, as best I could tell, and even with his head bandaged you could see he wasn't a hard guy. He looked at me with that lost, stunned look people have when they're certain they have but a short time to live.

"How do you feel, Mr. Coleman?" I asked.

He shook his head slowly.

"I'm the detective in charge of the Munger case, Mr. Coleman," I said. "I understand you want to tell us something about it."

"I . . . I don't want to go . . . without telling it," he said.

I nodded.

"He deserved to die," Coleman said.

"Why was that?"

"Because — because he destroyed my daughter!"

"Destroyed her?"

"Yes, *destroyed* her! He made a dope addict out of her." There were sudden tears in his eyes now. "A dope addict! Only fifteen years old, a sophomore in high school."

"When did you discover this?"

"Last night. I noticed she acted queerly when she came home — this was about eleven o'clock — and later, after she'd gone to her room, I went in after her to have a talk. She was just pulling her dress off and I — I saw the little red places on her legs . . . the little needle marks. I had read of such things; I knew what they meant." He broke off, shaking his head slowly.

"What did you do then?" Ed Sharber asked.

"I made her tell me about them. I — I slapped it out of her. She said an older girl had introduced her to Munger, and that Munger had started her smoking marijuana. Later on, he started her in on heroin. After she got so she couldn't live without it, he'd make her go to bed with him before he would give her any dope." He stared fixedly at me. "Munger deserved to die, officer."

"After she told you — what then?"

"I went to his apartment. He let me in when he saw the gun I'd brought. He kept backing up, all the way out to the kitchen." He moistened his lips.

I kept my voice even. "What happened then?"

He stared directly into my eyes, but I knew he wasn't seeing me. I knew he was seeing that kitchen where he had killed Roy Munger.

"Finally I — I told him why I was going to kill him," Coleman said. "He got down on his knees then, right down on his knees, and pleaded with me. I — I just laughed at him. Then he shut his eyes and began to cry — that's when I put the gun against his face and shot him."

What's Your Verdict?

No. 2 — The Uncooperative Wife

BY SAM ROSS

FRIENDS of Joe and Eileen Monahan said from the start that their marriage would never work out. The friends were right.

Things went along fine for the first year or so, but then Joe and Eileen began to have little quarrels every once in a while, and Joe got into the habit of ending these arguments by walking over to Eileen and clouting her a couple of times across the kisser. After that, in natural progression, he began to beat her up whenever he wasn't in a particularly good mood, and even, now and then, when he just had nothing better to do.

One Friday evening, Joe came home from work two hours late, and the reason he was late was that he'd stopped at a bar for some drinks with a bunch of the boys. Usually, drinking put Joe into a pleasant and light-hearted mood, but this time he'd had a couple too many, and he was nursing a sour stomach and a sour temper when he opened the door of the Monahan apartment.

Eileen should have known better, but she was pretty angry herself. So, instead of moving quietly into the kitchen and staying out of sight, she walked right up to Joe and said, "Where in hell have *you* been?"

Joe didn't do anything for a minute. He just stood there and stared, and then he balled up a fist and hit her in the jaw and knocked her to the ground. After that, instead of following his usual practice of yawning and walking away once she was on the floor, he leaned over and kicked her four or five times in the ribs and stomach.

So the friends were right, and that was the end of the marriage. When Eileen had recovered enough to speak, she said quietly, "We're through, Joe — I won't take these beatings any longer. If you won't leave, *I* will . . ."

Her statement rocked Joe, but only for a split second or two. The marriage had obviously been on the rocks for some time, and, anyhow, he'd already had many thoughts about how nice it would be to be free for a change.

"You don't have to leave," he said. "*I*'m going — and I'll never even miss you. Who the hell needs you, anyway?"

He packed a few things, and left the apartment without saying another word. That night, he rented a furnished room, and the next night he came around and took away the rest of his stuff.

The first few weeks after that were freedom to Joe, and felt pretty wonderful, but then he found himself wondering if he'd been so smart in walking out like that. It wasn't that he decided that, after all, he was still in love with Eileen; it was just that, in the two years he'd courted Eileen and in the year or so he'd been married to her, he'd lost the bachelor's viewpoint and technique, and now when he tried to get to home base with other women he just didn't get anywhere at all.

He went on trying, of course, dating some of the girls who worked in his place, and cruising the bars at night and trying to pick up something, but at the end of seven weeks he was still scoring zero — and by now he was in absolute agony. In between their fights, he and Eileen had done a lot of lovemaking, and he had to admit now, thinking about it, that she'd been pretty damn good at it.

Finally, when ten weeks had passed and he'd still gotten nowhere with other women, and all he could think about were those nighttimes back at the apartment, he went to the phone and called Eileen. Her attitude was extremely cold when she recognized his voice, and she was even colder when he told her that he'd like to come over and see her that night.

"If you've got some crazy idea about making up with me," she said, "you can forget about it. I've done plenty of thinking these past ten weeks, and I want a divorce. I've already talked to a lawyer about it."

"I'm not thinking about making up," Joe said. "I want a divorce, too — and that's why I want to see you. I want to work out the financial details with you."

"Financial details?" Eileen said. "Come around about eight o'clock."

Joe got to the apartment at eight, and he tried to make a pretense at first of talking about divorce matters, but he just couldn't keep his mind on it. For one thing, Eileen was wearing a sheer blouse and a tight skirt, and she was a very beautiful young woman. And for another, ten weeks is a mighty long time. So, abruptly, Joe put his arms around her, and suggested that they move over to the couch, which was much more comfortable.

Eileen's reaction was to begin to fight. "Where do you get your nerve?" she said, shrilly. "Get out of this apartment!"

But by now Joe was more than desperate, and he did the instinctive and obvious thing. He clipped Eileen on the button, and, when that took the fight out of her, he

dragged her over to the couch. He remained in the apartment for several hours, and, when he went back to his furnished room, he slept like a babe for the first time in nearly two months.

He was awakened several hours later by the phone, and it was Eileen on the other end of the line. She called him five or six names, and then said, bitterly, "Maybe you're wondering why I'm phoning. Well, I'll tell you why. I'm phoning to tell you that I'm getting the police after you."

Joe was only half awake, and he echoed, dully, "The police?" Then he thought he understood her. "You mean because I belted you one? All right, so they'll nail me for assault and battery — so I'll spend a couple of days in the cooler. Now let me go back to sleep."

"Assault and battery, my eye," Eileen said. "I'm having you arrested for *criminal* assault!"

Joe understood the term, and this woke him up completely. "Criminal assault!" he said. "You mean *rape!*" He started to laugh. "You're out of your mind. I'm still your husband, legally — I've still got a husband's rights . . ."

"That's what *you* think," Eileen said, and hung up.

Well, there's the question. Who's right — Joe or Eileen? *What's your verdict?*

THE ANSWER

Eileen's right, and Joe's in trouble. Under law, a husband *does* have the right to expect to be permitted to enjoy marital relations with his wife, but his recourse, in the event that his wife is unwilling, is to seek a divorce on the grounds of frigidity — frigidity being valid grounds for divorce or annulment in many states. That, however, is his only recourse, and if, instead, he overcomes the unwillingness by force, he is as guilty of criminal assault as if he and the lady were strangers.

Tin Can

One should not steal another's wife, Natalio believed. So when Natalio's wife disappeared, Natalio got to work on a small bomb . . .

BY

B. TRAVEN

THE Indian peasant, Eliseo Gallardo, had three pretty daughters of marriageable age, the eldest of whom was sixteen and the youngest thirteen.

One day Eliseo was paid a visit by Natalio Salvatorres, a young bachelor who for several weeks had worked in the nearby bush. From the wages he had made by burning charcoal, Natalio had saved about fifty pesos. But after he had bought a new cotton shirt, cotton pants, bast hat, and paid for his board and lodging, he had little left.

Last Saturday there had been a dance in the village, and it was at this dance that Natalio had seen the three pretty Gallardo girls. However, he had been able to dance only once with each of the girls, because the other young men had always been quicker and more resolute than he. Natalio was a young man who needed time to make up his mind.

He spent all of the next day, Sun-

day, thinking things over. When, finally, he had arrived at a more definite idea, he spent Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday getting better acquainted with it. On Thursday his idea matured sufficiently so that, by Friday, he knew clearly what he wanted.

It was this which made him go on Saturday to see Eliseo, the father of the three girls.

"Well, young man, which of the three do you want?" Eliseo asked.

"That one," Natalio said, and nodded his head toward Sabina, the daughter who was fourteen and had the prettiest bosom of the three.

"That's what I thought," Eliseo said. "She would suit you very fine. You are not so dumb. By the way — what is your distinguished name?"

After Natalio had given his full name, which he could pronounce but could not write nor spell, the girls' father asked how much money he possessed.

"Twenty pesos," Natalio said. This was twice as much as he really had.

"Then you cannot have Sabina," Señor Gallardo said. "I need a new pair of pants, and my old woman has no shoes of any kind. If you wish to appear so splendid as to ask for Sabina, you can't expect her mother and father to run about in dirty rags. What do you think our standing is in this village, anyway? There must be new pants for me, and there must be at least one pair of white or brown canvas shoes for the woman. Otherwise there is no opening for you in my family. Let me have some of your tobacco."

After the cigarettes had been rolled and lighted, Natalio said, "*Bueno*, don Eliseo. I'll be satisfied with just as fine a girl as that one over there." This time he nodded toward Filomena, the eldest of the three.

"You are smart, *muy listo*, Natalio. Where are you working?"

"I own a burro. And a good young donkey it is, too."

"No horse?"

These questions concerning his financial situation made Natalio quite uneasy. He spit several times upon the earthen floor of the hut before he spoke again.

"I have an uncle who works in a mine up near Parral," he said. "There are more than a hundred mines up there. As soon as I have a woman, I'll be on my way there to work. My uncle will see to it that I find a job. He is very friendly with one of the most important foremen."

"Ah, yes," Eliseo said.

"And what do you think, don Eliseo? One can easily make three pesos a day in those mines."

"Three pesos a day is good money," Eliseo said. "But that pitiful twenty pesos you have right now is not much to boast of. With so little money, we cannot make a wedding."

"Why not?" Natalio asked. "A wedding can't cost that much money. A minister? Well, we surely can't

pay him — so we will have to do without the help of the church. And as for the marriage license — we can't pay for that, either, can we?"

"You are right, Natalio," Eliseo said. "There is not enough money in the whole world to pay for such things. And besides, they have little to do with a wedding anyway."

"Very little indeed," Natalio said.

"Of course, we must have at least two musicians for the dance," Eliseo said. "Then we must have three bottles of mescal — or, better still, four bottles. Otherwise the people here in the village might gossip about us. They might say that Filomena was not married to you at all and had only run away with you like a hussy. I tell you, *muchacho*, such things are not done in my family. Not *my* daughters; no, señor. We are honest folks. Don't ever think one of my daughters would run away with you without my special permission. You might as well wait a thousand years for such a thing to happen in my family. Not with a father like me around. No, señor — not with us."

The two men continued their negotiations for another two hours, during which time they drank many cups of coffee and smoked most of Natalio's tobacco. In the end it was agreed upon that Natalio should return to the bush until such time as he had earned enough to pay for the musicians, the bottles of mescal, two pounds of coffee, six pounds of brown sugar, one pair of light canvas shoes for the mother, and one pair of pants for the father. And in addition, Eliseo pointed out, there should be two pesos for sweet bread to be eaten with the coffee by the women and children who would come to the wedding. In fact, he said, the whole village would be at the wedding, and if a few pesos happened to be left over for unexpected guests from a neighboring village, so much the better for the good reputation of the family.

When the deal was closed, and Natalio had accepted all the conditions proposed by the father, he was told that he would be allowed to lodge and board with the family. He would have to pay for this, of course, but the cost would be one-third less than he was paying now. He was to take up his quarters in a certain corner of the one-room adobe hut, and, as there might be many difficulties and molestations if handled otherwise, Filomena was to be permitted to sleep in the same corner — provided Natalio would buy her a new blanket.

Natalio agreed to this, and hurried to the nearest general store to buy a new blanket with the brightest colors he could find. Then he bought a bottle of mescal to celebrate the deal, and returned to the hut.

All the members of the family, including Filomena herself, had been present during the whole time the two men had been negotiating what, to them, was a straightforward business matter.

After everyone had taken a drink from the bottle of mescal, Filomena was asked by her father if she had something to say.

"I'd like very much to go to Parral," she said.

Natalio was short those ten pesos he had lied into his pocket; and during the eight weeks he worked in the bush his new shirt and pants went to pieces, in spite of the fact that he was very careful with them. He had to buy a new shirt and a new pair of pants for the wedding, and it was because of this that an American farmer, who had a ranch only a few miles from the village, discovered one day that two of his best cows were missing.

The wedding dance was over. Señor Gallardo had been quite drunk. But he had not been too drunk to take great care not to get mud on his new yellow cotton pants. His wife had worn her new brown canvas shoes during only the first hour of the party. She had then wrapped them in paper, replaced them in the cardboard box in which they had been sold and, with pride in being the owner of such a treasure, had hidden them so well that none of her daughters could find them.

Because everything had taken place just the way it had been planned beforehand, Filomena was now Natalio's *esposa*, respected by everybody as a wife whom nobody must covet or try to snatch away.

Natalio loaded his two blankets, a coffee kettle, a small bast bag containing provisions, his machete, his ax, and his Filomena on his burro and started off for the mines.

He had no uncle there. This had been another of his various lies to win the confidence of Filomena's father. Nevertheless, because he was willing to take on any job, no matter how hard it might be, it was less than a week before he found work. He did not make three pesos a day, of course; all he earned was one peso seventy-five.

During his spare time Natalio built a flimsy adobe hut, much like all the others in the village. Here he and Filomena led the life of the average Indian miner and his wife. She cooked his meals, did his laundry, patched his shirt and pants, and warmed up his bed in the cold nights so frequent in mountain regions.

He was very happy, Natalio was; and Filomena, obviously, had no cause for complaint. This status quo might have lasted for a whole lifetime, had it not been for a young miner who discovered in Filomena something special and wonderful — something Natalio would never even have suspected she possessed.

And so it happened that when Natalio came home from work one night, he found no wife in his nest. And as she had taken with her the beautiful blanket, the three muslin dresses, and her comb — all the things he had bought her — he knew she had left for good.

The huts in the village were so carelessly made, and built of such poor material, that there was very little privacy under their roofs. They had no windows, and because of this the doors were always left open until the inhabitants retired for the night.

It was, therefore, not difficult for Natalio to find the hut he was looking for. Through the wall of this particular hut, made of a light network of twigs and sticks, Natalio saw Filomena sitting happily at the side of her newly elected. She and her new man, as Natalio could easily see, were having a much more joyful time than any he had ever had with her. She had never looked at him or caressed him in the way she was now favoring her lover.

There were two other young couples in the hut. And although there was much talk and laughter, Natalio did not hear his name mentioned even once. The way these young people ignored his existence, he might as well have been dead for a long time.

When Natalio had convinced himself that Filomena was now far too happy and too much in love to ever think of returning to his side, he decided to bring this episode of his life to an end. He went to the barn where the explosives were kept, crawled under the sheet-iron wall, and stole some dynamite and a fuse.

Back in his own hut, Natalio worked steadily and patiently. With the cunning of which only an Indian seeking revenge is capable, he constructed a bomb, using as a bomb-case an empty tin can he had found near the general store.

As soon as he finished the bomb, Natalio returned to the hut where he had found Filomena with her lover. The three couples were still there, and even more animated and jolly than before. Filomena's lover was playing a mouth organ, with Filomena cuddled up against him, and by all appearances the three couples intended to keep the party going until the men had to go to work again in the morning.

It was easy for Natalio to throw the lighted bomb through the open door into the hut.

This done, he went back to his own hut and lay down to sleep, content with the knowledge that he had made the most effective bomb of which he was capable. The result was of no special interest to him. Should the bomb go off, as he was sure it would, everything would be all right. On the other hand, if the bomb failed to explode, everything would be all right too. He considered his revenge fully completed with the acts of making the bomb and placing it properly. As to what might happen afterward — he left that to providence. From now on — and for all time to come — Filomena and her new man would be safe from him. For Natalio, this episode was closed forever.

But not for the three couples inside the hut. . . .

In the mining districts, every Indian, man and woman alike, knows what it means to see at one's feet an old tin can to which a smoking fuse is attached.

The occupants of the hut saw the bomb and jumped out of the hut without even taking time for a shout of horror. This took them less than half a second. At once a terrific explosion followed, sending the hut up a hundred feet into the air.

Of the six people who had been inside, five escaped without so much as a scratch. The sixth, the young woman of the couple that owned the hut, was not so fortunate.

This woman had, at the very moment the bomb made its appearance at the party, been busy making fresh coffee in the corner of the hut farthest from the door. She had neither seen the bomb nor noted the rapid and speechless departure of her guests. Consequently she accompanied the hut on its trip upward. And since she had been unable in so short a time to decide which part of the hut she would like best to travel with, she landed at twenty different places in the vicinity.

Two days later a police agent came to the mine to see Natalio and ask him what he might know about the explosion. The agent questioned Natalio at the place where he was working, in an open excavation, but Natalio did not allow himself to be seriously interrupted. Only when he paused to wipe the sweat from his face and roll a cigarette, did he honor the agent with answers to his questions.

"You threw the bomb into the *choza* of Alejo Crespo, didn't you?" the agent asked.

"That's right," Natalio said. "But it's none of your business. It is a purely domestic affair."

"A woman was killed by that bomb."

"I know it. No need to tell me. It is my woman and I can do with her whatever I wish, for she gets from me her meals, and all her clothes, and I have paid for the music at the wedding. There are no debts left. Everything is paid."

Natalio knew what he was talking about. There was no nonsense in what he said, and he was telling nothing but the truth.

"But the trouble is," the agent said, "it wasn't your woman who was killed. It was the Crespo woman."

"So? If it was the Crespo woman that was killed, then I've nothing to do with it whatever. The Crespo woman has never done me any wrong. If she was killed, it was most certainly not my intention. In such a case it was just destiny. I'm not responsible for what destiny may do here in the village. The Crespo woman is a grown-up woman who can look out for herself, and she doesn't need me to protect her. If she'd taken better care of herself, this would not have happened to her. I'm not her guardian, and not her man either, and I don't give a

damn for women who don't take care of their health."

Natalio threw his cigarette away, lifted his pickax, and struck furiously at the rocks, indicating he had important work to do and could not waste his time with idle talk which was of no interest to him.

Six weeks later, the case came up for trial. Natalio was charged with murder, though no degree was mentioned. The jury consisted of men from the village. Two were foremen at the mines, one was a carpenter, one a butcher, another a baker, others were storekeepers and saloonkeepers. None of them had even the slightest interest in Natalio's conviction. All of them depended on miners at work, because no money could be made from miners in jail.

Natalio's friends had advised him to keep his mouth shut as much as possible. If he was forced to answer any questions, they told him, he should say absolutely nothing other than, "I don't know."

This advice suited Natalio quite well. He disliked working with his head, and simply answering, "I don't know," required no work at all.

He was not deeply concerned about the outcome of his trial. If he was convicted and had to go to prison — or even if he was sentenced to be shot — it would be all right with him. On the other hand, if he was acquitted, he would go back to his work, which he liked immensely.

He rolled a cigarette, showing no emotion whatever. He cared nothing at all about the preparations going on about him in the crumbling adobe town hall.

Finally, the stage was set. Everybody in the courtroom smoked cigarettes, including the judge, the public prosecutor, the gentlemen of the jury, and the half-dozen or so miners. These visitors had come, not because of any real interest in the trial, but because they were not working, due to injuries received in the mines, and had no other place to while away their time. They would have preferred to hang around the saloons, but they had no money. Some of them had bandages on their face or head, others carried their arms in slings, and one had crutches leaning against his leg.

The public prosecutor stood up. "The defendant has made a full confession," he said. "The police officer who questioned him only two days after the crime was committed is present to be called to the witness stand, should it so please your Honor and the honorable gentlemen of the jury."

The prosecutor was sure he had a clear-cut case and that he would have no trouble getting a conviction. What really did concern him, however, was the chance that he might not be able to catch the train in time to return to town, which would mean spending the night in this miserable, stinking little village.

The men on the jury had begun to dislike the prosecutor. They re-

sented his arrogance and the way he showed how he detested the people of the village, especially the miners, and they had seen how much he hated to have been ordered to a place where he could not walk half a block without losing his shoes in the mud.

Because they wanted to see the overbearing prosecutor miss his train and go home defeated by the men he despised, the jurors insisted on their right to question both defendant and witnesses, if they thought it was necessary in order to clear up the case for their better understanding. If Natalio himself should benefit by this procedure, so much the better. The men on the jury were much impressed by Natalio because he was so calm and stoic.

The judge welcomed these unusual interruptions by the gentlemen of the jury. He had to stay overnight anyway, because he had several other cases to attend to. These interruptions made the trial less dull for him and shortened his day. He was thankful for this, because Natalio's was the only case for the day, and he had nothing to do with his time once it was over. He usually slept the time away in places like this, but he had already slept so much here that he was tired of it.

One of the jurors asked the judge to please ask the defendant if it was true that he had confessed to the murder.

Natalio rose clumsily. "I don't know, señor," he said. He sat down again and replaced his cigarette between his lips.

Another juror asked to see the written statement of Natalio's confession.

The prosecutor jumped to his feet. "This statement, gentlemen of the jury, is written and signed by the police officer, which was necessary because the defendant can neither read nor write. In due time I'll call the officer to testify here in court. The witness is an honorable and reliable police officer with an excellent record and many years of service. We have no reason whatever to question his written and verbal statements, nor the results of his careful investigation of this case." He bent down over his little table and began fingering his papers with obvious uneasiness.

Another member of the jury wanted to know why he and his honorable colleagues should be obliged to believe more in the word of a policeman, who received his salary from the taxpayer's money, than in the word of an honest and sober miner like Natalio, who did not live, and never had lived, on the money of the taxpaying citizens. He said it was well known that Natalio worked hard for his living and that he produced valuable goods for the benefit of the whole nation.

Still another juror asked the defendant to confess right then and there, in the very face of the jury, that he had committed the crime he was charged with.

The judge called upon Natalio. "You heard what the honorable gentleman of the jury wishes to know. Did you kill the Crespo woman?"

Natalio rose only halfway. "I don't know, señor," he said quietly.

The prosecutor jumped to his feet. "But you did throw the bomb, didn't you, Natalio?" he demanded. "Tell us the truth, my man! Lying won't help you. You did throw the bomb!"

With a bored note in his voice, Natalio said, "I don't know nothing." He sat down again and puffed away at his cigarette with signs of an undisturbed conscience.

The prosecutor did not call the policeman, as he had said he was going to do. He knew they would ask the policeman if it was not true that he received his salary from the taxes paid by the citizens. As soon as the policeman admitted it was so, the jury would then ask the prosecutor where *his* salary was coming from. And this, the prosecutor realized, would lead to still another question. The jury would ask, quite seriously, whether — inasmuch as both the policeman and the prosecutor received their salaries from the same source and therefore served the same boss — there might not exist a certain combination with the object of convicting an honest miner for no other purpose than to justify the necessity of their respective offices.

Because he foresaw such a layman's distortion of the facts, the prosecutor decided against calling the policeman to the stand. Instead, he called Filomena, together with the others who were present in the hut when the bomb was thrown. Inasmuch as these witnesses belonged to the mining community, their testimony would be so tight that even the most spiteful members of the jury would have to accept it without question. The prosecutor considered Filomena his star witness. He was sure she would tell the truth, because she certainly knew the bomb had been intended for her, and she would feel much safer knowing that Natalio was in prison for several years.

Filomena and the other witnesses knew perfectly well what the whole community knew; that is, that nobody else but Natalio had been the maker and thrower of the bomb. Natalio had left no one in the village with any doubt as to who it was that knew how to defend his honor and how to punish an unfaithful wife.

But the prosecutor had had but little experience with Indian mining folk such as these, and he by no means fully understood them. He did not know that these mountain people would not, under any circumstances, bear witness against one of their own in a case such as this one. These mountain Indians had their own ideas of right and wrong and justice, just as they had their own attitude toward outside prosecutors and judges, and nothing whatever

could have induced them to testify against Natalio.

On the witness stand, the people who had been in the hut declared without wavering that they had not seen the person who threw the bomb. When they were asked by the desperate prosecutor whether they thought Natalio might have done it, they said the bomb might have been thrown by a former lover of the Crespo woman, a man known throughout the state for his jealous nature and hot temper. He was, they said, a man who was ready to do anything if he felt insulted.

Filomena went further still. She said she had known Natalio very well, since she had been his *esposa* for a couple of years, and that she was absolutely sure he would never do such a thing, that he would, in fact, be the last man on earth to do so. She said she was certain Natalio had never had an affair with the Crespo woman, that she could not even imagine he might have wanted to do the Crespo woman any harm. Natalio, she said solemnly, was not of a violent nature, but was, instead, surely the most peaceful man she could think of.

The prosecutor stared at Filomena unbelievingly. "The prosecution rests," he said.

Natalio's attorney, provided by the state, had not said one word so far. Now he rose and said, "The defense rests also!"

The jury retired. Less than an hour later, because they had business to attend to, they returned.

"Not guilty!" the foreman said.

Natalio was set free immediately. Then he and the witnesses, including Filomena and her new man, went to the nearest saloon to celebrate the acquittal with two bottles of mescal. The bottles passed from mouth to mouth, no one bothering with a glass, though now and then one of them would put a pinch of salt between his teeth.

After the bottles were empty, Natalio returned to his job. There were still a few hours of his working day left, and he, honest miner that he was, did not want to miss them.

On the first Saturday night following the trial, Natalio attended a dance in the village. There, dancing with Rudecindo Ortega was a young woman who pleased him greatly. After Natalio had danced with her twice, and discovered that her name was Lolita and that she was neither married to Rudecindo Ortega nor even living with him in his hut, he retired to his own lonely hut for an hour to think things over.

Then, his mind made up, Natalio returned to the woman, reminded her he was a sober man who could stick by his job and earn his money, and asked her to live with him as his wife. She quickly agreed to do so.

Lolita arrived at his hut the next day, bringing with her all her belongings in a sugar sack, which she hung up on a peg. Once settled, she looked around the hut, cleaned

the floor, and began to prepare supper.

While the beans were cooking, Natalio walked to the general store to buy his new woman a comb. On his way out of the store, he saw Rudecindo Ortega staring thoughtfully at the pile of rubbish and empty tin cans near the door. He spoke to Rudecindo, but the other man seemed to be brooding about something and did not answer.

When Natalio returned home, he went to the back of the hut, lay down, and stared up at the ceiling.

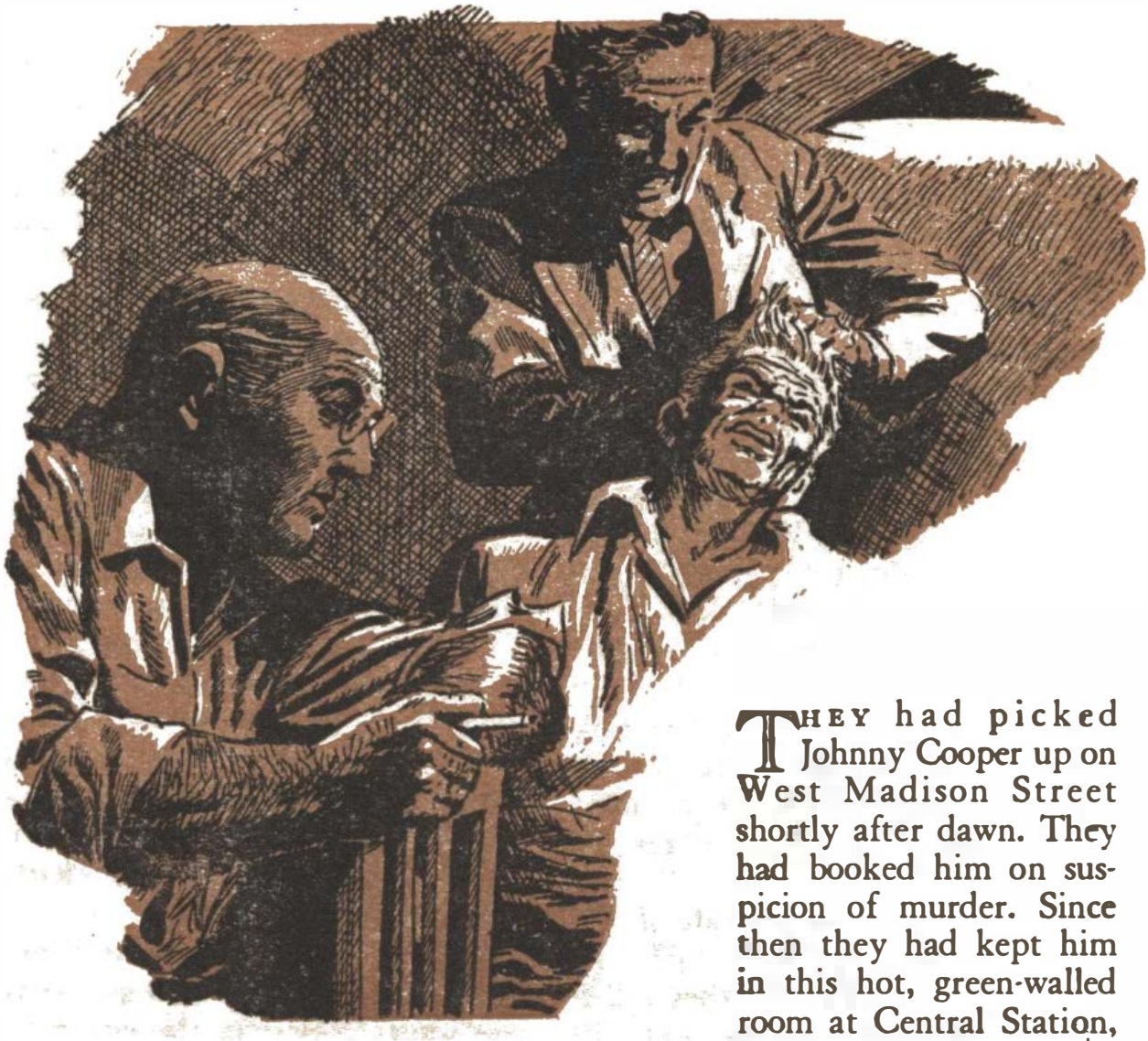
"You do not seem happy, Natalio," Lolita said. "Why is that?"

"Ah, but you are mistaken," Natalio said. "What man would not be happy with such a treasure?"

Lolita put the steaming beans on the table. Then, as she turned back toward the hearth, she saw lying in the middle of the earthen floor a large tin can to which a smoking fuse was attached.

Natalio saw it too, and in the same instant realized why Rudecindo Ortega had been staring so thoughtfully at the pile of tin cans and rubbish beside the general store.

The woman escaped unhurt. Of Natalio Salvatorres, though, not even so much as a shirt button was ever found for the woman to remember him by.



Ambition

BY PATRICK MADDEN

"Nobody," the cop said, "nobody would just walk up and murder a stranger!" But that's just what Cooper had done.

THEY had picked Johnny Cooper up on West Madison Street shortly after dawn. They had booked him on suspicion of murder. Since then they had kept him in this hot, green-walled room at Central Station, trying to sweat a confession out of him.

There were just two detectives with him now. They were tired, and he was tired— but he wasn't ready to talk. He was willing to admit that he had killed the guy, but he knew they wouldn't let it go at that. They would want to know why, and that was the part he didn't want to explain.

They wouldn't understand. Probably nobody would understand.

"We're giving you a break, Cooper," Sergeant Brannon said. He was in charge of the questioning. He wore rimless glasses and seemed patient, almost soft. But there was nothing soft about his chunky body or the thick, hairy arms crossed on the back of the chair he straddled.

Cooper ran his hand through his oily yellow hair and across his forehead, then wiped his hand on his khaki trousers. His dirty white shirt was drenched with sweat. He was in his early thirties, but the tight lines around his mouth made him look ten years older. "A break?" he echoed. "How?"

"It's a hell of a lot easier to talk here than it will be in that courtroom," Brannon said. "You might as well get your side of it on the record."

"Who cares about my side of it?"

"By God, we do," said the other detective, the one they called Smitty. He was young and tall and broad. He looked down at Cooper with contempt. He couldn't see spending all day coaxing a confession out of a skid row bum. "You think we got you in here just to look at your ugly kisser?"

Cooper looked at him, his thin lips twitching upward in a sneer. "You oughta wise up, kid," he said. "Be nice like your boss here."

Smitty stepped to Cooper's side and grabbed a handful of his yellow hair. He jerked his head back. "And I should teach you some manners."

"Leave him alone," Brannon said. "We don't need that."

Smitty let go of Cooper's hair reluctantly and took a handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped his hand.

Brannon said, "I've never seen anybody who wouldn't help themselves when they were up against it . . ."

"I've already helped myself."

"And what does that mean?"

"Nothing. Not a goddamned thing to you or anybody else."

"What's it mean to you?"

"To me it's the whole works."

"Cut the double-talk," Smitty said. "If you're going to talk, talk."

"What should I say?" Cooper asked. "That I killed him? You want me to say that I killed him?"

Smitty nodded slowly. "That's it exactly."

"Okay," Cooper said. "I'm saying it. I killed him. Now you got what you want? Now you through with me?" He made a move as if to rise.

Brannon motioned him back into the chair. "We knew that part," he said. "There wasn't any doubt about that. But what's the rest?"

"That's all."

"Come on. The whole thing."

"Okay, I'll start from the beginning," Cooper said. He hooked his arm over the back of the chair and spoke in a very tired voice. "I was standing in this doorway on West Madison, smoking a cigarette.

This guy came down the street. I dropped the butt and stepped on it. When the guy got up to me, I jumped him. Beat him down with my fists, and then finished him off. Strangled him there on the sidewalk. That's all. Beginning to end."

Brannon shook his head slowly. "No, Cooper. There's got to be more. How long had you known him? Where'd you first meet the guy?"

"I never met him. I don't even remember what he looked like . . . hardly. He came down the street, like I said . . ."

"Okay, okay," Smitty said. "Don't go through it again."

"Nobody kills a perfect stranger," Brannon said. "Nobody sane."

"I did," Cooper said proudly. "And I'm as sane as anybody."

"Then there's a reason. Do *you* know what it is?"

"You're damned right I know . . ."

"He didn't like the way the guy walked," Smitty said dryly.

"Let him talk. Come on, Cooper, why?"

He had known it would be like this. Why, why, why? What difference did it make to them. They had him. He'd confessed. He was ready to pay for it. And he was getting what he wanted out of it.

"Spit it out, Cooper. What was it all about?"

"I just killed the guy. Now leave me alone, for chrissake. I *had* to kill him. That's all."

"My Christ!" Smitty said. "If that don't take the fur-lined pot."

There was a knock on the door. Brannon said, "Come in."

One of the jailers, a tall, stoop-shouldered man, entered the room, carrying a newspaper. He offered it to Smitty and said, "Thought maybe you guys'd want to read about your big case. Made page one."

Smitty took it and glanced at the headline and laid it on the table he'd been leaning against. "Thanks, Oscar," he said. The jailer looked over his shoulder at Cooper as he left the room.

Cooper seemed excited about something. Smitty looked at him, annoyed, and said, "What? You gotta go?"

Cooper ignored him. He said to Brannon, "Listen, I'll try and explain it to you if you'll do me a favor . . . nothing unreasonable, I swear." Maybe Brannon would understand. Smitty never would.

Smitty said skeptically, "You better tell us first."

Cooper nodded to Brannon. "I'll even do that," he said.

"Go ahead," Brannon said.

Cooper worked his grimy hands together nervously and started to talk.

"I been up against it all my life," he said in a whining voice. "I ain't blaming it on the world — I guess it's been my fault as much as anybody's. Still I've always wanted to do things, and ain't ever had the

chance — or the guts. I've been shoved around. I was standing in that doorway thinking about that and a million other things. How fast the years were going. And I was wondering whether I should go get a room or a drink or go jump in the goddamned river — even though I ain't ever had the guts to do that. Then I saw this guy coming down the street. I thought: If I step out and speak to him, he'll walk by me like I'm a post. Anybody would. Everybody would. Everybody in the goddamned world. I was nothing. Not a name, not a face . . . nothing."

Cooper studied Brannon's face to see if he understood. Then he went on.

"Then it all came to me. I said to myself: The only way this guy'll even admit I'm alive is if I hurt him. Hurt him bad. And if I hurt him bad enough — kill him maybe — everybody'll hear about it. They'll know it was Johnny Cooper that done it. I'll have *some* part in everything then. Be something anyway . . . something."

Brannon said, "Jesus Christ." He looked at Smitty. "You ever hear anything like it?"

"Never."

They both looked at Cooper with disgust and pity.

All the tension had left the air. Cooper's voice was like a bell ringing on in a firehouse after the engines have gone as he said, "Okay, I told you. Now all you gotta do is let me see the newspaper."

"Leave it alone," Brannon ordered. "Get back on that chair." He said to Smitty, "Buzz for the turnkey, will you?"

Cooper sat on the edge of his chair, reading the tall headlines hungrily. SKID ROW KILLER FOUND WITH VICTIM. Underneath was a picture of Cooper being put in the wagon by two cops.

After a moment he looked up. "You get it, don't you?" he asked. "Everybody's reading that paper. They're seeing my name and picture there — right now. Maybe a million people are reading about me. For once they know I'm . . ."

"We get it, Cooper," Brannon said. "We get it. Now shut up."

But Cooper had an identity now, and it made him feel strong. He kept talking. "I'm not nothing anymore. I'm a killer. For a little while I'm Johnny Cooper the killer. People'll be talking about me. Let 'em hate my guts. Let the whole goddamned bunch hate me. At least they won't be ignoring me."

The door opened, and the tall jailer who had brought the paper earlier came into the room.

Brannon said, "Get him out of here, will you, Oscar?"

The jailer ambled across the room. He took hold of Cooper's arm.

Brannon got off his chair and said, "Just a minute." He picked up the newspaper. "Here," he said. "Let's give the poor bastard his life's work."

CRIME CAVALCADE

BY VINCENT H. GADDIS

Bad Blood

A thief in Vienna, Austria, came up with a desperate alibi recently. Shortly before his arrest, he'd had a blood transfusion. It musta been robber blood, he insisted.

Practical Psychology

Knoxville, Tenn., police, faced with a boy who denied breaking into a school, pulled a fast one. He might as well confess, they said. They had a big piece of the broken window pane with his fingerprints on it.

"Couldn't be," the boy said alertly. "I was wearing gloves."

Arrival in Style

An Oklahoma City attorney really thought things through before engaging an ambulance lately. He had himself driven in swank to the home where his divorced wife was entertaining a boy friend.

Before letting go with his right, he explained to his rival, "I brought this ambulance along and I paid the freight. One of us is going to ride to the hospital."

Then he swung and missed, but the boy friend didn't. The ambulance took the unconscious lawyer off to the hospital.

Alias Escape

Heavy sleep cost a weary prisoner his bail, embarrassed officials, and gave a quick-thinking cellmate his freedom recently in New York City.

Warden Herman J. Ruthazer stated that $500 bond was posted for one Herbert Brown, 21, held on suspicion of burglary. With him in his cell was James Briggs, 39, of Brooklyn. A jailer going to release Brown found one of the men peacefully sleeping, the other alert to opportunity. Briggs said he was Brown. Released on Brown's bail, Briggs vanished.

Using His Head

A Los Angeles soft drink stand owner, Max Labell, 23, recently put his schnozzle to good use. After robbers tied him up and took $56 from the till, he summoned police by pulling the telephone from the counter with his teeth, and dialing the station with his nose.

Animal Lover

A defense attorney took a novel line in a San Francisco murder trial. His client, he insisted, could not possibly have killed his wife because previously he had refused even to kill a mouse.

However the judge refused to admit the testimony. It merely proved,

he declared, that the prisoner "probably liked mice."

Back Home

Shortly after his recent release following nearly four years for burglary, Lee Roy Javine, 36, San Quentin parolee, knocked on the prison gates and begged for his cell back.

"My in-laws are driving me nuts," he said. "I gotta get some sleep." Warden Harley O. Teets obliged him with a bed.

Lousy Loot

Sacramento, Calif., police received a telephone call from an auto thief as to where they would find the car he had stolen the day before. "Tell the owner thanks for me," he concluded, "but his car's in rotten shape."

Playful Handicap

A Long Beach, Calif., man, Adam Thiele, was acquitted of drunken driving by a sympathetic jury when they learned that instead of a stomach full of liquor he'd suffered from ears full of toes.

Thiele testified that when he was arrested for erratic driving under the influence, police had failed to see that from the back seat of the car, his young son and a neighbor's were busily tickling Thiele's ears with their toes.

Fantastic Fate

In Chicago, Judge Charles Dougherty handed down a one-year sentence to a thief cruelly betrayed by chance. The prisoner stole a car owned by a gasoline station operator, then drove it to the owner's station for gas.

"Out of 8000 filling stations in Chicago," the judge told him, "you picked the wrong one."

Wages of Sin

In Coventry, England, Zdyslaw Wysocki, Polish laborer, was fined 20 shillings for drunkenness. The next culprit on the docket, on the same charge, proved to be a fellow countryman less versed in English. Wysocki interpreted for him — at a profit. The court obligingly paid him for his services — 21 shillings.

Hot Temper

In Haverhill, Mass., Catherine Yuele, 26, was fined $25 for turning in a phony fire alarm. Indignantly she explained that she only wanted to know why her boy friend, a fireman, stood her up on a date. Could be, he was working, she thought — and waited to see when the truck pulled up.

Prisoner of Love

An incredible tale of a wife who hid her lover for twelve long years in 5 different states was belatedly unfolded after a Los Angeles murder which occurred in August, 1922.

The victim, Fred Oesterreich, was living with his wife, Dolly, in that city when he was shot one

night in the hallway of his home. Police found Dolly locked in a closet, and she convinced them that burglars were responsible.

For eight years the case remained dormant, until in March, 1930, her lawyer revealed an astonishing story.

The Oesterreichs came from Minneapolis, where, back in 1911, Dolly fell in love with their mutual friend, Otto. Discovering the intrigue, Fred swore that he would kill the lovers if they ever met again.

But Dolly was not easily thwarted. In a tiny space beneath the attic rafters, she made a hideaway for Otto, where he stayed day and night except when he crept down after Fred left for work, "to help with the housework." After 6 years the Oesterreichs moved to Los Angeles, and the ever-loving Otto followed, once more to be secreted in a succession of Los Angeles attics from 1917 till the summer night in 1922 when Fred surprised him in the hall and Otto shot him dead. Then the resourceful murderer locked his mistress in a closet and returned to his attic hideout, where he lay low through repeated searches of the house by detectives.

Because of the time lag before facts came to light, Otto was freed under the statute of limitations, and Dolly herself was acquitted. The public could never understand how during those 12 years of Otto's infatuated and willing imprisonment, no caller had ever surprised Otto helping Dolly, or no delivery boy gossiped about them cozily drinking coffee. In all those years how could Fred Oesterreich have failed to search the attic for mysterious mice? And above all, how could the small army of detectives searching the house after the murder have failed to find Otto's cubby-hole?

Canine Cut-up

A definitely new look appears on the shop-lifting scene now that dogs are taking up the racket. A Concord, N. H., dime store reports that a brown and white cocker spaniel has been busily looting the toy counter. He was first caught making off with a small train, and later nearly succeeded in escaping with a boxed set of toys.

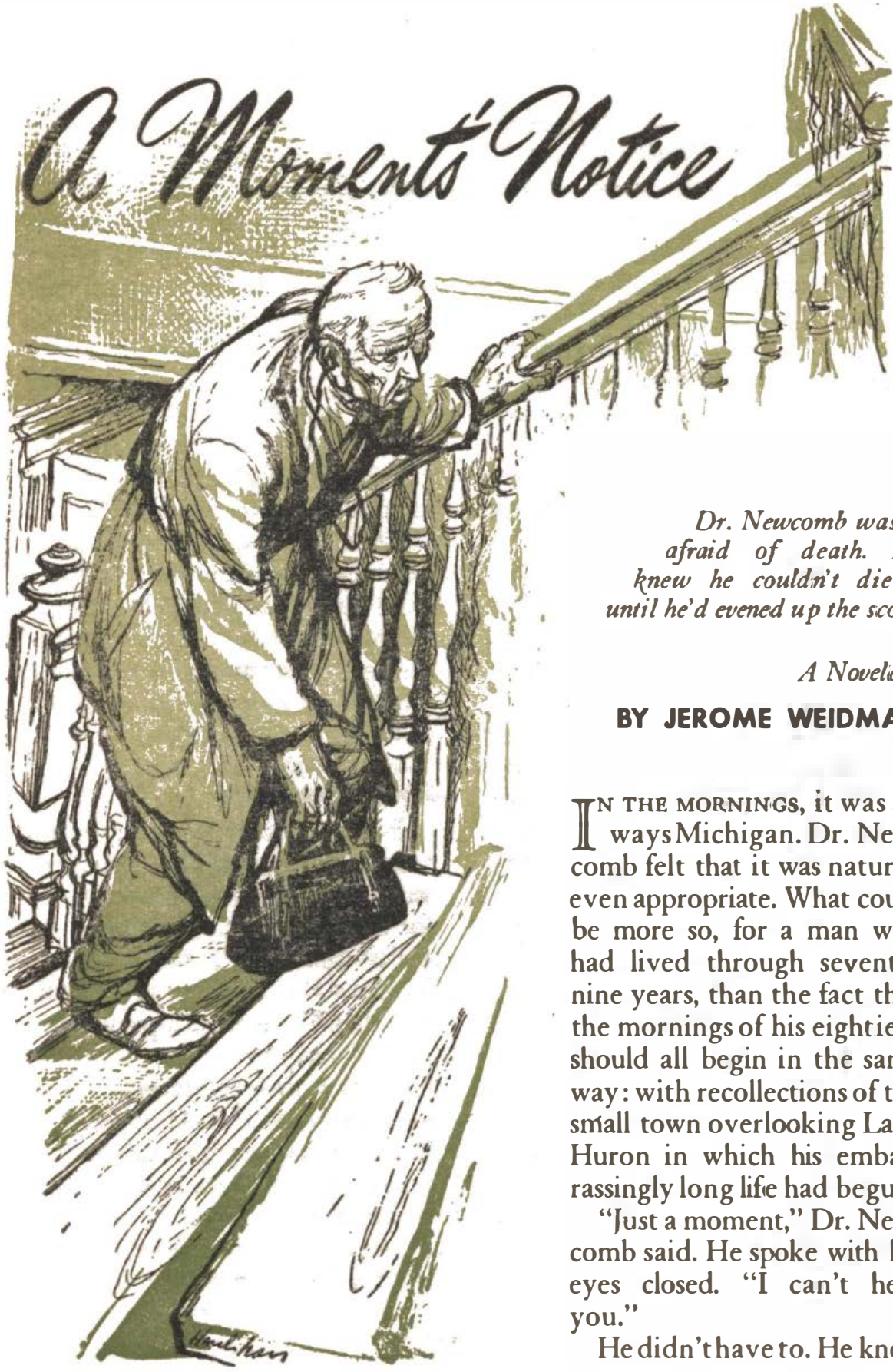
Sympathetic Sailor

Ernest McDade, a 23-year-old seaman from Mountain City, Tenn., was jailed in New Orleans recently for his soft heart. McDade, visiting a city dime store, was so overcome by the sight of some caged birds for sale that he released 9 parakeets and 4 canaries.

Larry Kabel, pet department manager, reported that McDade opened the cage, crying, "Come out, little birdie! I know just how you feel. I was in jail too."

Sequel — he was in jail again. And most of the birds were recaptured.

A Moments Notice



Dr. Newcomb wasn't afraid of death. He knew he couldn't die — until he'd evened up the score.

A Novelette

BY JEROME WEIDMAN

IN THE MORNINGS, it was always Michigan. Dr. Newcomb felt that it was natural, even appropriate. What could be more so, for a man who had lived through seventy-nine years, than the fact that the mornings of his eightieth should all begin in the same way: with recollections of the small town overlooking Lake Huron in which his embarrassingly long life had begun?

"Just a moment," Dr. Newcomb said. He spoke with his eyes closed. "I can't hear you."

He didn't have to. He knew

the words that had come from his bedroom doorway as intimately as he knew every word that would be directed at him during every moment of the interminable day that stretched ahead. They never varied. They were part of the ritual to which his life had been reduced.

He opened his eyes and reached for the ear-piece of his hearing device. He inserted it carefully, trailed his fingers back along the corded wire from his ear to the bedside table, lifted the battery compartment, dropped the neat little silver-plated box into the breast pocket of his pajamas, and turned his head on the pillow.

"Now," Dr. Newcomb said. "What did you say?"

"I said good morning," Robert said. "How are you today?"

Even though Robert's voice came through only faintly, because Dr. Newcomb's hearing device had not been serviced for some time, the old man on the bed heard every syllable. He had never quite become accustomed to the small shock of amazement he experienced whenever he heard that voice. Even long ago, when this portly but still attractive man in this New York doorway had been a slender and astonishingly handsome boy in a Michigan frame house, his voice had already possessed that curious power to evoke in every listener that sense of confidence and charm, the impression of courtesy and intelligence, all those qualities of strength and integrity in which the harshly mocking years had proven the owner of the voice to be totally lacking.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you," Dr. Newcomb said to his son in the doorway, "but I'm really fine."

"I wish you wouldn't say that," Robert said, and he added the small, charming smile with which, every morning, at this same time, he modified the same remark. "It isn't really very funny, father. You know that."

"Yes, I know," Dr. Newcomb said, and of course he did. But that was something his son could not be expected to know. Not yet, anyway. Robert was only fifty. A mere boy. Measured by the yardsticks to which his father had attained, Robert was not even that. Which raised, as it always did, the question of what Robert really was. And, as he always did, Dr. Newcomb eased that particular question gently but firmly from his mind. They both knew what Robert was.

He preferred to think, as he did every morning at this time, about the puzzling blind alley into which his long life had led him. He was like a traveller, all packed and ready to depart at a moment's notice, who does not understand why he cannot bring himself to go. There was no reason to linger. His work as a general practitioner, to which Dr. Newcomb had with zestful devotion given half a century of his vigorous maturity, had been for a long time now beyond his failing powers. His wife was gone. His money, which

had never interested him enough to deflect any of his failing energies into the process of amassing more of it, was running out. Every road of logic led to the same conclusion: his day, like his usefulness, was done; it was pointless to stay on. Every road save one. That one led inexorably to the fact that he had left something out. Somewhere between that small town overlooking Lake Huron in which he had been born and this large house overlooking Central Park in which he was prepared but unable to die, he had left behind a piece of unfinished business. The fact that his mind, in all other respects completely unimpaired, refused to disgorge the missing obligation, did not change the fact that, until it was wiped from the slate, the weary and impatient traveller could do no more than hold himself in readiness for instant departure.

Dr. Newcomb hoped that what they had would last as long as necessary. They had the house. And they had the income from the few thousand dollars in bonds, which was all he had been able to save from the holocaust after Mrs. Newcomb's death which had driven them to New York. If it wasn't quite enough, at least it had become the equivalent of enough since they had rented the upper two floors to the Cartwells. Or was their name Hartwell? Dr. Newcomb couldn't remember. So long as they paid their rent, it didn't matter.

"I've got a kipper for breakfast, if you want it," Robert said, coming back across the room. "But I don't suppose you do?"

Dr. Newcomb paused to watch Robert cross the room. He watched with the oddly helpless and confused feeling, part pride and part distaste and part wonder, on which every attempt to understand his own son had always foundered.

Even at fifty, with his dark hair going gray at the temples, with his astonishing features blunted somewhat by the faint puffiness of nearly four decades of alcoholic excess, and with his powerful frame padded, although not unpleasantly so, by a lifetime of overindulgence at the table, Robert still moved with effortless grace. Even the father who loved him could see that Robert was not entitled to look like that. Not necessarily because Robert at fifty — the survivor, through his father's efforts, of a dozen scandals involving women, liquor, cards and worse, which had driven the Newcombs from city to city at regular intervals — was as totally lacking in contrition as he had been when, at seventeen, he had stolen money for the first time. No. It was for an entirely different reason.

The simple decencies, which Dr. Newcomb's own parents had implanted in him without preaching or even obvious effort during his boyhood on the shore of Lake Huron, and which Dr. Newcomb had tried, in his turn, to pass on when he himself became a father, seemed to have

made no impression at all on Robert. It was simple enough, even though it might be painful, to punish the wicked. It was more difficult perhaps, but certainly possible, to forgive the sinner. But how did one deal with the wicked who were ignorant of the meaning of wickedness, with the sinner who had no conception of sin?

The only occasions on which Robert seemed to be aware that he had done anything the world condemned came at the moments when he was caught. At such times he was, of course, suitably sorry and full of the appropriately phrased promises to turn over a new leaf. Dr. Newcomb learned soon enough that the promises meant nothing. He even grew accustomed to the sense of despair with which he faced each new proof that Robert was incorrigible.

That despair had been understandable. Acts that turned you with contempt or hatred from the criminal stranger, merely intensified the fiercely unreasonable desire to protect the criminal son.

What Dr. Newcomb never grew accustomed to, what filled him even now at eighty, not so much with shame, as with an almost impersonal sense of wonder, was Robert's lack of awareness. Robert did not really *believe* that he was doing wrong. Robert had never actually *felt* that he had no right to do what he had done. He seemed to live with a sense of his own uniqueness. That, and only that, was what seemed wrong to Dr. Newcomb. That, and only that, was the father's failure.

"No, of course I don't want the kipper," he said, counting silently, as he moved toward the bathroom, to make sure he reached the door in the customary eight steps. He did. "You go ahead and have the kipper. I'll have the usual."

2.

Robert, having finished the dishes, came in from the kitchen. "I guess I'll be pushing along," he said. He glanced at the clock as he untied the apron with which he protected, during his morning chores, his beautifully cut lounge suit. Because what they had left — the income from the few bonds, and the rent from the Cartwells or Hartwells — was at best no more than just enough, the suit represented an outrageous extravagance. But extravagance, like outrage and excess, was typical of Robert. "You'll be all right," he said. "Won't you?"

"Yes, of course," Dr. Newcomb said. He took the last sip of coffee, set down the cup, rose slowly from the table, and moved toward the leather armchair near the bow window in which he now spent his days. He reached the chair, as always, in twelve steps and, as always, Dr. Newcomb waited until he was seated before he uttered the second half of his reply. "I'll be all right."

"Grand," said Robert, taking down from the rack beside the door the Homburg and cane without

which he never left the house. He set the hat on his head with care, cocking it at the rakish angle that, on any other man, would have looked preposterous. On Robert it looked far from preposterous. On Robert it looked almost terrifyingly perfect, the crowning touch to an ensemble and appearance that proclaimed the man of parts and virtue, in the prime of a usefully active life, at the peak of his considerable and admirably employed powers: everything Robert Newcomb was not, and had never been. "If there's anything you want," he said pleasantly, as he pulled open the door, "I'm sure it will keep until I get back."

"So am I," said Dr. Newcomb, without irony, stating no more than the simple fact. "There's nothing I want."

Except, of course, he reflected as the door closed behind Robert, the replies to those unanswered questions. They rose now to the surface of Dr. Newcomb's mind, as they did every morning at this time, and he leaned back, aware only faintly, because of the waning strength of his hearing device, of the traffic noises from the street outside, and allowed the familiar questions to range about freely in his mind.

Where did Robert go every day at this hour? What did he do with himself, every day of the week except Saturday and Sunday, between eleven in the morning, when he had finished the breakfast dishes, and five in the afternoon, when he came home to prepare his father's dinner? He certainly did not go off in pursuit of what used to be known, in Dr. Newcomb's youth, as gainful employment. Although Robert had never had a career, he had held, for different lengths of time, a series of unimportant jobs in the various cities across the country in which the Newcombs had lived. Most of these jobs had ended with the troubles that had driven the Newcombs out of those cities. During their first years in New York, Robert had worked as a customers' man in several brokerage offices downtown and, as recently as last year, as a section manager for a department store on Thirty-Fourth Street. During each of these jobs Dr. Newcomb had, almost literally, held his breath, but happily they had all ended for no more significant reason, apparently, than Robert's tendencies toward consuming half a dozen martinis at lunch and holding inordinately lengthy telephone conversations with bookies and women during business hours. There had been no major scandal for ten years.

Nothing worse than a few bad checks, and several staggering tailor's bills, which Dr. Newcomb had, of course, made good and paid. No, on the whole, in view of what had happened in other cities, Dr. Newcomb had no cause for complaint about Robert's conduct in New York. Only puzzlement.

What went on in Robert's mind? How could a man, who had lived

Robert's life for forty-odd years, live the life with which Robert had apparently been content for the last two or three? Had he succumbed gradually, perhaps even unconsciously, to the inflexible rule that everything in life, even the sowing of wild oats, ultimately palls? Was he, perhaps, more exhausted than he looked? Could Robert — for all his still dashing air, in spite of his still magnetic vigor — be, in his own way, finished? Was that why, during the last few months, even though the family's finances — which had deteriorated steadily since, almost five years ago, Dr. Newcomb had been forced, by his failing strength, to give up completely the practice of medicine — had reached the point where it had become necessary to rent the upper floors to the Cartwells or Hartwells, Robert had stopped even the pretense of looking for a job? Had the world become, as it had become for an entirely different reason to Dr. Newcomb, too much for Robert? Had he, like so many better as well as so many worse men before him, given up at last?

Part of the answer was obvious. For all his criminal tendencies, which in Robert's mind were not of course criminal at all, there was the curious bond that held him to his father. It seemed to be woven of two strands. Dr. Newcomb knew, even though the knowledge gave him scant pleasure, that Robert was afraid of him; aged, infirm, almost helpless, Dr. Newcomb was still what he had always been: the stronger of the two, the only human being for whom Robert had ever entertained what passed in his mind for respect. And Dr. Newcomb knew also that Robert, like himself, was caught to some extent by that unknown factor in the equation of life for which nobody, not even Robert, dared seek an explanation: blood was thicker than water; Dr. Newcomb's lifelong and unreasonable desire to protect his criminal son took, in Robert, the curious form of an equally unreasonable desire to protect his helpless father at least from the knowledge of the son's crimes. That double strand — Robert's almost grudging respect; and his warped but inescapable filial feelings — was strengthened, of course, by the even more obvious fact that whatever money still remained was in Dr. Newcomb's name.

In addition to this partial answer, there was the odor of liquor on Robert's breath when he came home at five o'clock. If Dr. Newcomb did not know where Robert now spent all of his days, he certainly knew where his son now spent at least part of them. Was it possible that, trapped by the drab necessity for serving as cook, housemaid, and nurse to his aged father, Robert was reduced to stealing nothing more than the few hours from eleven to five every day for sitting in some bar on Madison or Lexington Avenue, nursing the one or two drinks that could be pur-

chased by scrimping the already painfully scrimped family grocery fund that was entrusted to his care, lost in reveries of the fiery, irresponsible, buccaneering days of his youth? Or was he merely marking time, like Dr. Newcomb himself, but for an entirely different reason, waiting for his father's death and the few thousand dollars that would then be his and with which he could launch one final assault on the world that Robert had never considered as anything but his legitimate prey?

The petulant rasp of the door buzzer, cutting through the unanswered questions tumbling idly through Dr. Newcomb's mind, brought the old man's nodding head erect. Astonished, he listened again. It *was* the buzzer.

For a long moment, as he listened to the persistent signal from the front door, Dr. Newcomb refused to believe it. He and Robert never had callers. Certainly not at this hour of the day. Yet the unmistakable sound, buzzing weakly in Dr. Newcomb's ear piece, making itself heard above the faint traffic noises from the street, indicated that somebody was at the door. Annoyed, and not a little concerned, because the movements involved were a deviation from his routine, Dr. Newcomb rose, made his way slowly across the room, and opened the front door.

3.

"Good morning, sir," the man on the front step said with the brisk, cheery intimacy of the commercial caller. "I hope I haven't disturbed you?" He paused, and perhaps he realized, from the vacant expression on Dr. Newcomb's face, that he was either unwelcome or unknown. At any rate, the cheerful smile changed just a trifle, and his voice grew more hurried, as the man said, "Surely you remember me, sir? I'm Mr. Holley, of the Ear-O-Phonic Corporation? Manufacturers of your hearing aid?" Mr. Holley, as though summoning assistance, drew a batch of cards from his pocket, riffled them quickly, and extracted one. "Our records indicate that we serviced your Ear-O-Phonic Super De Luxe Senior exactly six months ago," he said, reading from the card. "According to this card, your Ear-O-Phonic is due for its semi-annual check up today." Mr. Holley's smile expanded to its former dimensions of confidence. "May I come in, sir?"

"Oh," Dr. Newcomb said and then, as the visitor's words sank in and conveyed their delayed message to his unprepared brain, he managed a smile of his own, and added, "Yes, of course. Come in. I didn't know for a moment who you — Did you say Colley?"

"No, Holley," Mr. Holley said. "I can see from the fact that you didn't catch my name, sir, that your Ear-O-Phonic may need a new set of batteries, too." He lifted his small leather case from the front step and came in. "We like to keep

our customers satisfied, sir. Now, if you'll just remove that little box from your pocket, and let me have a look at it, I'll have your Ear-O-Phonic working as good as new in a jiffy."

He did. Or as close to a jiffy as Dr. Newcomb's slow movements permitted. When the silver-plated box was back in Dr. Newcomb's pocket, he was not at all sure the improvement was welcome. The traffic noises from the street, a few minutes ago no more than a faintly lulling murmur, were now growling vigorously in Dr. Newcomb's ear; and Mr. Holley's briskly efficient voice, asking if Dr. Newcomb cared to pay the service charge now or would he prefer to be billed by mail, stabbed up through the corded wire to his eardrum like a handful of pebbles flung against a pane of glass.

"I'd rather pay now," Dr. Newcomb said. Since he had begun to understand that his relationship to the world in which people like Mr. Holley functioned had been reduced to that of a traveller waiting with packed bags for the signal to depart, Dr. Newcomb had developed an intense dislike for bills. His neat mind recoiled not only from the possibility that, if he did go, as he knew some day he must, at a moment's notice, he might leave an unpaid bill behind, but also from the certainty that, if he did, Robert would not bother to discharge the obligation. "If you'll wait just a moment," Dr. Newcomb said, "I'll get the cash."

He walked slowly across the sitting room, out into the kitchen, and across to the shelf, over the stove near the back door, on which was kept the empty tea canister that contained the household shopping money. Reaching up to take it down, Dr. Newcomb noticed that the back door, which led out to the rear entry and the service stairs that wound upward to the two top floors, was open. This was puzzling because, since those two top floors had been rented, the rear entry and the back stairs had been converted into a private entrance to the house for the Cartwells or Hartwells, and this kitchen door was always kept locked to insure their privacy. Robert, Dr. Newcomb reflected, must have forgotten to relock it after he opened the door to put out the empty milk bottles that morning. Bringing the canister down from the shelf, Dr. Newcomb stepped across to nudge the kitchen door shut.

His elbow, touching the wood, seemed to set off an explosion in his hearing device. Startled, and thrown off balance by the gentle thrust of his elbow and his desire to keep the tea canister from falling, Dr. Newcomb staggered forward, through the open door and into the rear entry. His frail body, catching itself against the newel post of the service stairs, seemed to set off another explosion in his ear piece, and then Dr. Newcomb did drop the canister.

It struck the rubber matting with a dull thud that, to the normal ear,

would have been no more than that, and the coins and paper money escaped with a gentle tinkling and faint slithering that, to the average listener, would have been not even remotely disturbing. To Dr. Newcomb, however, whose hearing device had just been tuned up and revitalized, the dull thud and the gentle tinkling and the faint slithering were as the rattle of musketry close at hand. The rattle was not loud enough, unfortunately, to drown out the rancorous voices hurtling down from upstairs.

Clutching the newel post to support his trembling body, dazed as much by the shock of what he was hearing as by the small but, for his wasted frame, shattering exertion that had tumbled him out here, Dr. Newcomb was aware only of a desperate desire to escape before he learned more. Unfortunately, the pattern of rigidly maintained small habits, of which his life had for so long consisted, now held him in its relentless grasp. His body did not know how to deal with something outside that routine. His body could not deal with it swiftly, at any rate. By the time he was able to get his muscles to respond to his terrified brain's plea for help, Dr. Newcomb had heard it all. Or as much as he would ever want to know.

4.

Breathing with difficulty, his hands shaking crazily, the old man managed to kneel down, claw the spilled money back into the canister, make the agonizing return journey of half a dozen steps to the kitchen, and close the back door. Shutting off the bitter voices from upstairs seemed to help. Temporarily, anyway. Dr. Newcomb gave himself a few moments during which, holding his body upright against the stove with both hands, his breath and his wildly beating heart began to settle down. When they had returned to an approximation of normalcy, he counted out the correct sum from the canister, decided against the effort involved in replacing it on the shelf, and went back into the sitting room.

"Thank you," Mr. Holley said as he took the money. "I couldn't help wondering —" His briskly efficient voice stopped, and a flicker of concern washed across the look of meaningless joviality on his face. "Are you all right, sir?"

"Yes," Dr. Newcomb managed to say. "I'm fine."

He wasn't, of course, and he was already aware, even in these first moments of shock, that he never again would be.

"I didn't mean to pry, sir, but it's just that, while you were out there, I thought I heard —" Mr. Holley's voice stopped again, and the look of meaningless joviality came back into his face. "Well, I guess I'll be running along." He picked up his small leather case and moved toward the front door. "Thank you very much," Mr. Holley said as he pulled the door open. "Goodbye for now, sir. I'm

certain you'll find that your Ear-O-Phonic is now as good as new, and you won't have any trouble until I drop in again, six months from now, sir."

Dr. Newcomb, staring at the closed door, found himself wishing he could share that certainty. Then he realised that wishes were futile. Besides, his knees were still unsteady. He turned and, with the support provided by pieces of furniture along the way, he succeeded in reaching the leather chair near the bow window. Lowering himself into it, he became newly aware of the traffic noises from the street growling harshly in his head. Dr. Newcomb reached up and, with trembling fingers, drew the ivory receiving button from his ear.

At once the traffic noises went dead. So did all the sounds of the world around him. All of them, that is, save one. The sound of Mrs. Cartwell's voice, or perhaps it was Mrs. Hartwell, could not be shut out. Not because the voice of Dr. Newcomb's tenant was so strident that, from the upper floor, it could penetrate his deafness. Or even because, of the two voices that had exploded into his consciousness when Dr. Newcomb had stumbled out into the rear entry a few moments ago, hers was the only one that had been freighted with the unmistakable and unmanageable burden of despair.

The sound of that voice, whether its owner was named Cartwell or Hartwell, could not be shut out because it was more than the voice of a human being caught in the harrowing moment of certain knowledge that there is no hope. It was much more than that. The despairing voice of the woman upstairs provided the answers to those questions about Robert — how he spent his time, what his plans were, whether the years in New York had brought any changes in his character and way of life — that had been circling idly through Dr. Newcomb's mind for so long. He wished that they were still circling. How much better it would be if he were still in the dark, if the veil that fear of his father, the grudging respect that had always caused Robert to conceal from Dr. Newcomb, until the moment of discovery, of course, the details of his escapades, had not been torn away by that despairing voice from upstairs. Because, strongest of all, that despairing voice from upstairs was also an echo, the echo of another voice that Dr. Newcomb had succeeded, for ten long years, in banishing from his mind.

5.

"Don't ask me," the owner of that other voice had said, ten years ago in Cleveland, as she twisted away from him. "Please don't ask me, Dr. Newcomb."

Dr. Newcomb, staring down at the sobbing figure of Cora Ward, had wished with all the desperation of his weary heart that he had the strength to comply with her request.

"I've got to ask you," he had said. By hiring her as his nurse, shortly after the Newcombs had come to Cleveland, he had brought her into his house and thus, in effect, had placed her within reach of the blow that he should have known, even if a girl as simple as Cora Ward could not be expected to know, would inevitably strike her. "I've got to ask you," Dr. Newcomb had said again, staring down at the girl on the bed who had failed to come to work that morning and, a half hour ago, had summoned him by phone. "What is his name?"

"I can't tell you," Cora Ward had said, her voice muffled in the pillow she was gripping with both hands. "Please don't ask me, Dr. Newcomb," she said, and then the muffled voice broke in a whisper of shame. "Please help me."

"I can't help you until I know his name," Dr. Newcomb said. This was not true, of course, as Cora, who was an excellent nurse, should have been aware, but Dr. Newcomb had to know for reasons that went beyond the purely medical assistance she wanted. "Was it my son?" he said. She did not answer, but her body was suddenly stilled. "Was it Robert?" Dr. Newcomb said. There was a long moment of silence, and then the girl on the bed, her face averted, her body rigid, moved her head in a short, desperate nod. "When did it happen?" Dr. Newcomb asked. Cora did not answer, and he decided not to press her. Not on that point, anyway. His examination had revealed that she was at least three months pregnant. "Did you submit to him?" Dr. Newcomb asked. "Or did he attack you?" The eruption of sobs from the tortured girl seemed to bring Dr. Newcomb to his senses. What difference did it make? Robert's powers over women had been established long ago, in other cities, before the Newcombs came to Cleveland. "I'm sorry," Dr. Newcomb said quietly. "I shouldn't have asked that, but I must ask something else." He drew a deep breath, but the weariness that lay like a physical lump in his chest refused to be dislodged, and he said gently, "Cora, was it Robert's suggestion that you call me?"

There was another moment of silence, and then the averted head on the pillow moved again.

"He said to call you," Cora Ward said in a whisper. "He said you would take care of everything."

Robert had been right about that, Dr. Newcomb thought bitterly. He had always taken care of everything for Robert in the past. Why not now?

"I can take care of financial matters," Dr. Newcomb said in a heavy, plodding voice, as though each word had to be dredged up separately from the reservoirs of his despair. "I can see that you're properly cared for, Cora, and that the baby gets a decent start in life, but I can't do what you want me to do. I can't perform the operation, Cora."

Her head came up, and the words escaped before she apparently understood the terrible indignity they implied.

"But he won't marry me," Cora Ward cried. "He said so, Dr. Newcomb. He said he never would. He said it was my own funeral. He said —"

Her voice stopped, and Dr. Newcomb leaned down to touch her shoulder.

"I know," he said and, of course, he did. He could imagine, at any rate, because he knew his son better and longer than Cora Ward did, what additional cruelties had issued through Robert's charming, irresistible, delicately savage smile. Robert was at his best with victims in their moments of hopeless realization of the extent to which they had been victimized. "I suppose it sounds cruel and insulting to say I'm sorry, Cora," Dr. Newcomb said. "I'm afraid, however, that it's all I can say. I'm more sorry than I've ever been in my life, but I can't perform the operation Robert assured you I would perform. No doctor in Cleveland, or in any other city, Cora, can perform that operation and remain an honorable member of his profession. You must forget what Robert said. If possible," Dr. Newcomb added with a touch of bitterness that he recognized even then was unforgivable, "I would suggest you forget Robert. Don't have anything more to do with him." Dr. Newcomb picked up his bag. "Mrs. Newcomb and I will see that you and the baby are both taken care of." He turned toward the door, so that this despairing girl would not see the despair that he knew was written clearly in his own face. "I'll talk to Mrs. Newcomb at once about making the necessary arrangements, and I'll come over to see you again in the morning." He turned back and, with an effort, he managed a reassuring smile. "Let's try to make the best of it," Dr. Newcomb said. "That's all that can be done, I'm afraid."

It wasn't, and perhaps he should have suspected it wouldn't be, but there had been nothing to warn him. Always, in the past, there had been boundaries. There was just enough of the coward in Robert to prevent him from going too far. Or perhaps, instead of cowardice, it was an instinctive knowledge of the point where the world, which could be duped with such ease, would finally turn and strike back. Whatever the reason, it had not prepared Dr. Newcomb for the call that reached him that night while he was at dinner, or for what he found when he got to Cora Ward's apartment twenty minutes later. It certainly did not prepare him for what, an hour after that, Robert said behind the locked doors of the surgery in their own house.

"So what?" Robert said. "Can you prove it?"

Of all the terrible and confused emotions that assailed the father as

he stared at his only son, the one that stood out clearest seemed so irrelevant as to be almost frivolous: Dr. Newcomb was astonished. For several moments he could not speak.

"Yes," he said finally, trying with all the strength in his seventy-year-old body to control his voice, to keep it level and direct. "I think I can prove it."

"Can you?" Robert said. "How?"

"I'm a doctor," Dr. Newcomb said. "I was summoned to the bedside of a girl who, until this morning, was my office nurse and, since this afternoon, has been my patient. She told me this afternoon that you are the father of her unborn child. Do you deny it?"

"I'm not denying anything, father," Robert said through his puzzlingly attractive smile. "I'm listening to your attempt to prove something."

"An hour ago, when I reached Cora Ward's apartment, I found that she had swallowed the contents of this bottle." Dr. Newcomb's hand shook as he held up the small vial. "She told me you had called on her this afternoon, shortly after I left her. Cora said that, when she reported I had refused to perform an abortion, you gave her this bottle." Dr. Newcomb could feel his voice begin to rise. He made one last effort to control it. He knew that, at all costs, he must keep his head. "Cora told me you said this medicine would achieve results similar to those of an abortion." The last effort at control failed. Dr. Newcomb's voice was close to hysteria. "Do you deny that?"

"I don't see that a denial is necessary," Robert said pleasantly. "And wouldn't it be wiser to lower your voice?" he added with a casual glance toward the locked door. "We don't want to drag mother in on this, do we?"

"Don't you understand what I'm saying?" Dr. Newcomb said. "You knew what was in this bottle when you brought it to her. Cora Ward told me you poured it out for her. She told me you held the glass to her lips. Don't you understand what I'm saying?" His voice seemed to disintegrate into a whisper of revulsion and horror. "You killed her."

"I wish you'd stick to the point," Robert said with gentle mockery. "You said you can *prove* I killed her, father, but I don't see that you're doing that at all. Nobody saw me go in or come out of Cora's apartment. Even if anybody did, certainly nobody saw me give her that bottle, or pour out its contents for her. You're merely repeating the statements of a hysterical girl, uttered while she was dying from a dose of poison that she could very easily have administered to herself. I understand it's quite common for girls in her — ah — condition to do that." Robert paused, and the mocking smile etched itself more deeply into his handsome face. "You seem to be shocked, father," he said. "I hate to shock you even more but, since

you're the one who raised that ugly word, proof, I don't see how I can avoid it. The contents of that bottle cannot even be traced in the normal way, as I believe it sometimes is when poorly advised people try to make more of these unfortunate cases than is necessary. The contents of that bottle were not purchased in a drug store, or from any other source that can be readily traced. As a matter of fact, father, I wouldn't be at all surprised to learn that the contents of that bottle came from your own shelves." Robert nodded, almost absently, toward the glass case full of medicines against the far wall. "If you don't mind my saying so, father," Robert said, "I think you're flirting with a highly unprofitable activity, namely, making a mountain out of a molehill. Artificially created mountains have a nasty habit of toppling. When they do, innocent bystanders sometimes get hurt. You and I are not the only ones to be considered, you know. There's mother." Robert paused and, for several moments, he seemed to be absorbed by the problem of whether or not his fingernails needed cutting. Then he looked up. "If I were you, father," he said, "I would forget ugly words such as murder and proof. If I were you, father, I would limit myself to writing that death certificate as suicide by poison, and then I'd sign it." Robert paused again. "Actually, if you can calm down long enough to consider all the implications," he said coolly, "I think you'll see that it's the most sensible thing to do, I'm sure."

6.

In the final analysis, that was the core of the horror, the most shocking aspect of something that went beyond shock: Robert *had* been sure. Not only of himself, but of his father as well.

The blood that had been so much thicker than water that it had for years, in effect if not in principle, condoned theft and forgery had led, as inexorably as death itself, to condoning murder. No man, except Robert, of course, could live with that. No woman, either.

Dr. Newcomb did not doubt that this was why his wife, who knew so much about Robert that she no longer needed specific detail to know more, followed Cora Ward to the grave a week later. Neither did Dr. Newcomb doubt now that this was why the last ten years—since he and Robert, tied at last to each other by bonds more inflexible than blood, had fled from Cleveland and settled in New York — had been for the father, if not for the son, no more than a long, and until this moment, successful, effort to forget.

Now that he knew the effort had been wasted, Dr. Newcomb regretted bitterly the success with which his mind had for so long shut out what he should have known from the very beginning would some day have to be faced. The ten-year delay had gained him nothing. On the con-

trary. It had lost him everything, including the one thing that could give purpose to the long agony of hoarding fragments of energy, of keeping himself alive over the protests of every fibre of his exhausted body and heart.

If he had done at the time what every instinct of decency and justice demanded, if he had turned the murderer, who happened to be his son, over to the Cleveland police, he would have been spared a decade of trying to blot out the knowledge that he was an accomplice, ten years of sitting about with packed bags, waiting for his mind to disgorge the piece of unfinished business on the slate of his life so that he could wipe it clean and, at last, go. More than that, if he had done his duty ten years ago in Cleveland, he would have been spared now in New York, when his mind had been shocked by what he had overheard in the rear entry into relinquishing its secret, the bitter knowledge that he was as far from the longed-for moment of departure as he had ever been. He was powerless to wipe the slate clean. All he could do was sound a warning.

Wearily, like a laborer who gathers himself at the end of a long day, not for the welcome journey home, but for another and more difficult job that must be finished at once, Dr. Newcomb rose from the leather chair. Painfully, because each movement was a deviation from the rigid schedule by which he had for so long kept himself alive, he crossed the sitting room, went through the kitchen, opened the door into the rear entry, and started the exhausting climb up the back stairs.

When he reached the landing of the third floor, he felt dizzy and his whole body was quivering. Dr. Newcomb leaned against the jamb to rest, and he closed his eyes to thrust away the dizziness. When he opened them, a few moments later, Dr. Newcomb's glance was caught by a business card tacked to the center panel of the door. On it, in neatly engraved letters, was printed: *James C. Hartwell, Real Estate and Insurance.* In the lower right-hand corner, in smaller letters, appeared the address of Mr. Hartwell's office and, in the upper left-hand corner, was printed his telephone number.

Dr. Newcomb, still breathing hard, smiled bitterly. Now that it did not matter, because at least one result of Dr. Newcomb's warning would be that his tenants would move, he knew that those tenants, whom he had never seen because Robert had arranged the details of the lease, were named Hartwell and not Cartwell.

Dr. Newcomb raised his hand and knocked on the door. There was no answer. He knocked again. Still no answer. Dr. Newcomb could feel his forehead crease with puzzlement. It seemed to him that no more than a few minutes had gone by since he had overheard the angry voices from behind this door while he was trying to extract from the tea can-

ister downstairs the money with which he had paid Mr. Holley for servicing his Ear-O-Phonic. Raising his hand to knock again, Dr. Newcomb's glance stopped on his wrist watch.

Astonished, he saw that it was almost three o'clock. He must have fallen asleep in the leather chair after Mr. Holley left. Aware now of a sense of urgency that could not be dismissed, struggling with the mounting fear that it might be too late for warnings, Dr. Newcomb brought his knuckles down hard on the door. The sharp blow, which stung his entire arm, made no sound. Then Dr. Newcomb saw why. The ivory receiving button of his hearing device was dangling from its corded wire, on his chest. He had forgotten to replace it after he woke up.

With trembling fingers that seemed to get in their own way, he managed to set the ivory button back in his ear. At once, even though he still heard nothing, Dr. Newcomb's other senses seemed to grow more acute. A sharp, pungent odor, assailing his nostrils abruptly, caused his already hammering heart to leap with terror. He smelled gas.

"Robert!" he shouted as he clutched the door knob and twisted. "Robert, don't —!"

The door, moving inward, tumbled Dr. Newcomb forward into what had once been a spare bedroom and was now the Hartwells' living room. The air, which seemed delicately fogged, stung Dr. Newcomb's eyes and then caught in his throat. Gasping, he staggered across the room, through the open door that led into the small kitchen the Hartwells had installed between their living room and bedroom. Holding his breath, Dr. Newcomb found the knobs of the gas range and turned them all off.

Then, as swiftly as his aged body would carry him, he moved from window to window, through the bedroom, the kitchen, and back into the living room, throwing them all open. Holding onto the sash of the last one, and leaning as far out as he dared, he sucked in deep gulps of fresh air.

After a few moments, he turned back. Not until then did he notice that Robert was not in the room, and that Mrs. Hartwell, her face hidden in the upholstery, was lying on a couch against the far wall.

7.

Completely unaware that he was exerting himself to an extent that had for a long time been beyond the powers of his wasted body, Dr. Newcomb drove himself across the room, dropped to his knees beside the couch, and took Mrs. Hartwell's wrist. Her pulse, even though irregular, was still strong. From this, as well as from the fact that the air in the room was already almost completely cleared, Dr. Newcomb concluded that the gas had not been turned on hours ago, when he fell asleep downstairs. It must have been

done a short time before he knocked on the door. Feeling, as he stood up, the twinge in his knees, and the lurch of his heart, Dr. Newcomb's brain sounded a warning automatically, but he disregarded it.

He forced himself back to the door, down the stairs, and into his own bedroom. From the closet, he drew the small bag he had not used for five years. Halfway up the stairs, dragging the bag rather than carrying it, Dr. Newcomb's brain sounded another warning. He shook his head irritably, as though he were dismissing a meddlesome bystander, and set his teeth for the balance of the long climb.

When he came back into the Hartwell living room, Dr. Newcomb saw that Mrs. Hartwell had stirred in his absence. Either that, or he had moved her, without knowing he was doing it, when he took her pulse. However it had happened, he was glad Mrs. Hartwell was now lying on her back. Dr. Newcomb doubted, as he set the bag on the floor beside the couch, opened it, and began to fumble for the small bottle, that he would have been capable now, after his three trips up and down the stairs, of turning even a body so slender as Mrs. Hartwell's. He even doubted, until he came back from the kitchen with the glass of water, that he would be capable of getting the two tablets from the bottle into Mrs. Hartwell's mouth. When he did, and he succeeded, by forcing a few drops of water between her lips, in causing Mrs. Hartwell to swallow the tablets in a convulsive gulp, Dr. Newcomb had no doubts at all about his ability to cross the room to a chair. That was out of the question. He was finished. The best he could do, as the bottle of tablets and the glass of water dropped from his shaking hands, was tip the small black bag over on its side, to form a crude stool, and ease himself onto it. Then, squatting beside the couch, Dr. Newcomb folded his arms on his knees, and he dropped his head forward on his folded arms.

He was beyond further thought, as he was beyond further physical movement. He was aware only, through the closeness of his own laboring heart beats, of the overwhelming wish that he might die, now, before the terrifying process of thought could begin again. And, at the same time, he was aware of the futility of the wish. He could not die. He had not yet earned the right to do so. The slate of his life, on which his failure had been scrawled ten years ago in Cleveland, was still waiting to be wiped clean.

"What happened?"

The weakly uttered syllables brought Dr. Newcomb's head up. Mrs. Hartwell, he saw, was trying to say more. Staring at the young woman on the couch, watching her surprisingly pretty face struggle with the effects of the drug that was fighting off the gas she had inhaled, Dr. Newcomb was only mildly surprised to discover that Mrs. Hart-

well, whom he had never seen during the months that she and her husband had been his tenants, bore a distinct resemblance to Cora Ward. Why not, Dr. Newcomb thought dully. Robert's taste in women, as in everything else, had been established long ago. And, in a truth so searing that it was scarcely endurable, it was even just that this young woman, whom Dr. Newcomb had saved from death, should look so much like that other girl who, ten years ago, because of his carelessness, had died and, because of his cowardice, was still unavenged.

"What happened?" Mrs. Hartwell managed to say again.

"I don't know, but I can guess," Dr. Newcomb said quietly. "Unintentionally, several hours ago, I overheard an argument between you and my son Robert. I gathered, even though you have my assurance that I did not want to, that Robert had —" Dr. Newcomb paused, not so much out of delicacy as because he found it physically difficult to speak, and in the pause Mrs. Hartwell turned away, burying her face in the upholstery of the couch as, ten years ago, Cora Ward had hidden her shame in the twisted pillow of her bed. "I gathered that, some weeks or perhaps months ago, my son Robert told you he loved you and that, if you divorced your husband, he would marry you. Unless I am wrong —"

"He lied to me!" As the desperate words erupted between them, Dr. Newcomb was reminded again of Cora Ward. Like Cora Ward, Mrs. Hartwell had allowed the words to escape before she apparently understood the terrible indignity they implied. "He said he never promised. This morning, when he came up, he said he'd never promised to marry me."

"I take it, then, that I'm not wrong," Dr. Newcomb said wearily. "Mrs. Hartwell, you are pregnant?"

The slender body on the couch began to shake.

"Yes," Mrs. Hartwell said in a whisper. "When I told him, he said it was my own funeral."

"So you tried to arrange your funeral for him?" Dr. Newcomb said, nodding slowly, almost with relief, as though a piece of important evidence, in the presentation of the final case against his son, had at last been uncovered. He should have known that it was not Robert who had closed all these windows and turned on the gas. He should have known that Robert would not consider that necessary. Except for Cora Ward, who had been more simple than most, Robert's victims could usually be counted upon to complete their own destruction. "What did you think you would accomplish, aside from simplifying things for my son Robert, by turning on the gas?"

Mrs. Hartwell's face reappeared as she rolled her head weakly away from the upholstery.

"What could I do?" she said in a hopeless whisper. "I can't force him to marry me and yet, even though I hate myself for it, I love him, so I can't tell Jim what happened. If I did, Jim would kill him."

Dr. Newcomb's first reaction was completely impersonal. As though he were examining a patient for symptoms, his mind merely recorded the odd fact that Mrs. Hartwell's hopeless whisper had sent a stab of hope through his own exhausted body. Then, when the implications of that stab of hope burst through his exhaustion, when they rose in his mind so that he could see them clearly, Dr. Newcomb had another reaction. This one was intensely personal. For the second time in his long life, Dr. Newcomb knew he was afraid. Again, as had happened ten years ago in Cleveland, Dr. Newcomb wanted only to turn and run, to flee from those implications.

"Jim is your husband?" he said carefully, making an effort to stand and face what he had once been unable to face. Mrs. Hartwell nodded. Dr. Newcomb said, even more carefully, because he knew he was beyond running, "You have not told your husband?"

"Not yet," she said. "If you hadn't come up here, if you hadn't saved my life," she added, and her voice broke in a final sob of despair and bitterness, "I never would have had to tell him."

With a sigh that caused his already spent body to tremble like a plucked violin string, Dr. Newcomb pushed himself up from his improvised stool. The lesson that should have been learned ten years ago in Cleveland could not be disregarded again. He was too old to be afraid. He had too little time left to fool himself with the vain hope that he would ever again be granted another chance. There was only one certainty: this was the last chance he'd ever get.

"Perhaps it won't be necessary for you to tell your husband," Dr. Newcomb said. The flicker of hope, racing swiftly across Mrs. Hartwell's pale face only to be erased at once by the answering flicker of disbelief, reminded Dr. Newcomb that he had more than his fear to contend with. He had no certainty that his spent body, held together for so long by nothing more than a precariously balanced pattern of small habits, would hold together long enough for the last demand he would ever make on it. "At any rate," he said and he succeeded, as he had once succeeded for Cora Ward, in summoning for the girl on the couch a reassuring smile, "I'll see what I can do."

This, for a younger man, would have been very little. For Dr. Newcomb, whose life had been over ten years ago, it was almost too much. Almost, but not quite. Perhaps the most difficult part was waiting, while the watch on his wrist ticked away the few fragments of time he had left, to make sure the drug he had given her to counteract the gas would continue its healing work by

putting Mrs. Hartwell to sleep. By ten minutes after four, it did.

Certain at last that she was, for several hours, anyway, incapable of interference by making another attempt on her life, Dr. Newcomb moved away from the couch. At the door, where he turned for a last glance into this room he would never see again, he saw lying on the floor the small black bag and the spilled glass of water and the scattered tablets from the dropped bottle. Eighty years of habitual neatness made him hesitate. Then he remembered that the effort involved in walking back across the room, and picking up the bottle and the tablets and the glass, would have to be deducted from the already inadequate store of energy he had left for the important things that had to be done. Besides, he would never again need that black bag or its contents.

Dr. Newcomb stepped out of the room, pulled the door shut, reached up, and tore away the business card tacked to the center panel. Holding the card firmly in one hand, as though he were afraid that, if he put it into his pocket, he might never have the strength to take it out again, and supporting himself on the bannister with his other hand, Dr. Newcomb started his last descent on the back stairs of this house in which for so long he had been prepared, but unable, to die.

8.

In his own bedroom, which he reached with a sense of triumph that transcended the frantic beating of his heart, he went at once to the desk between the windows facing Fifth Avenue. A minute or two later, supporting himself with both hands, he paused to consider a problem he had not counted on. Getting the paper and the fountain pen and the envelope out of the desk drawer had proved so difficult, that Dr. Newcomb suddenly doubted the wisdom of sitting down. He might not be able to get up again. Since this had to be avoided, Dr. Newcomb solved the problem by carrying the paper and the pen and the envelope across to his bureau. It was an excellent solution.

By writing the letter standing up, leaning on the bureau top to steady his body as well as his pen, he not only saved the by now pitifully few, but intensely crucial, fragments of strength that would have been squandered in the effort to rise from the desk; he succeeded also in writing a more legible document.

When it was finished, Dr. Newcomb read the few sentences twice, folded the sheet carefully, inserted it in the envelope, sealed the flap, wrote "To Whom It May Concern" across the front, and put the envelope into his breast pocket. Then and only then, and still holding the card he had torn from the door upstairs, Dr. Newcomb lowered himself to the bed in a sitting posture. The numbness that spread at once through the lower half of his body

proved beyond further doubt how wise he had been to avoid sitting down at the desk. Dr. Newcomb knew he would never again be able to stand up.

It was all he could do to lift the receiver from the phone on the table beside the bed and dial the number on the card in his hand. A girl answered.

"Good afternoon," she said. "James C. Hartwell, Insurance and Real Estate."

"Mr. Hartwell, please," Dr. Newcomb said. "It's very urgent."

"Who is this calling, please?"

"Dr. Newcomb. I am Mr. Hartwell's landlord."

"I'm sorry, sir," the girl said. "I don't know if I can disturb —"

"Please," Dr. Newcomb said. "It's terribly urgent."

The sound of his voice must have carried more conviction than his words.

"Oh," the girl said, in a sort of gasp, and then, "Just a moment, please."

Not much more than that could have elapsed before James Hartwell's voice replaced hers on the wire, but the gap of silence, to a man of eighty who could feel the last drops of his strength flowing away like water from a ruptured pipe, seemed an eternity.

"Dr. Newcomb?" James Hartwell said, and then, sharply, "Is anything wrong?"

The sound of his voice was reassuring. Until he heard it, Dr. Newcomb's entire plan, the whole edifice to which he had committed these last minutes of his long life, had been built on nothing more than the ray of hope that had shot through him after Mrs. Hartwell had said that, if she told her husband about Robert, Mr. Hartwell would kill him. James Hartwell sounded like the sort of man who would do just that. Even if he didn't, James Hartwell sounded like the sort of man who would certainly make the attempt. For Dr. Newcomb's purpose, that would be enough. There was no time to do, or even hope for, more.

"I'm afraid something is terribly wrong," Dr. Newcomb said. "How long would it take you to get here from your office?"

"Why, if I grabbed a cab, I could get there in ten minutes, I guess," James Hartwell said, and he added, in a tone of irritability so needlessly savage that it brought a small smile of satisfaction to Dr. Newcomb's face, "What the hell is this all about?"

Before answering, Dr. Newcomb shifted the phone, moving it heavily from his ear so he could look at his wristwatch. It showed a quarter to five. Three or four minutes would be enough to explain the few facts that needed explanation. This meant that, if Robert came home, as he always did, promptly at five, and if James Hartwell's estimate about how long it would take him to get here was correct, both men would arrive at the same time, which was

fine. James Hartwell might even arrive a minute or two earlier. His first instinct would be to rush upstairs, via his own private entrance, to look at his wife, and that would be, for Dr. Newcomb's purpose, better than fine. It would be perfect. Dr. Newcomb shifted the phone laboriously back to his ear.

"This is about your wife," he said. "I don't think I can talk very long, Mr. Hartwell, so will you listen carefully, please?"

He did. At any rate, by the time the phone went dead at the other end, Dr. Newcomb knew James Hartwell had heard all that was necessary.

Leaning forward, in an effort to replace the phone on the hook, Dr. Newcomb realized he would not make it. He didn't. The phone dropped from his already limp hand. As the clattering thud, amplified by the freshly tuned up hearing device, stabbed up into his ear, Dr. Newcomb's sense of neatness gave him a moment of uneasiness. He had always hated to leave things lying about. Then he realized something else. He would never be able to speak into that phone again, anyway.

Twisting his body in one final effort, Dr. Newcomb succeeded in getting himself into position. With a sigh of relief, rather than exhaustion, he allowed himself to fall back on the bed. The effect was so immediate that, for a moment, he could scarcely believe it. He had been waiting so long, all packed and ready to depart at a moment's notice, that he found it difficult to accept the fact that he had at last been able to send for the taxi that would carry him down to the train.

9.

Then the recollections of Michigan, which belonged to the mornings, and not to this part of the day at all, began to crowd in on him, and he knew it was all right. Because now those recollections, which were part of the time of his own innocence, long before Robert was born, were not a distraction. Now they were welcome. The ceaseless task of policing the precariously balanced pattern of small habits, to which his life had been for so long reduced, was over. There could be no more distractions. There could be only rest.

In the act of giving himself up to it, Dr. Newcomb's neat mind insisted first on a final check of all the details. He touched the breast pocket in which the police would find the hand-written letter requesting that James Hartwell's wronged wife be presented with Dr. Newcomb's few thousand dollars in bonds as well as the deed to this house. The police, or the law, might not honor that request, but nobody could fail to honor Dr. Newcomb's intention, which was to provide for Mrs. Hartwell, and Robert's illegitimate child, as well as the legal fees Mrs. Hartwell would probably want

to pay to defend her husband in the trial that would be the inevitable result of what was about to happen under this roof. Holding the recollections of Michigan away for another moment, Dr. Newcomb retraced the telephone conversation in which he had just explained to her husband the criminal attack on Mrs. Hartwell and the reason why he would find her drugged. That would take care of Robert. And then, to make sure he had straight in his mind the reason for what he had just done, Dr. Newcomb allowed himself once again to relive the moment of horror, now ten years old, in which Robert had made his father an accomplice to murder. That took care of everything. The unfinished business of his embarrassingly long life was finished at last.

Reaching up to remove for the final time the ivory receiving button from his ear, Dr. Newcomb's faltering hand stopped dead. The freshly serviced hearing device had caught clearly the sound of a taxi door slamming shut in the street outside. The harsh sound stabbed up, through the corded wire, through the pervading sweetness of the recollections of Michigan, like an accusation. James Hartwell was on time. A moment later, as he heard Hartwell's heavy footsteps thundering up the back stairs, Dr. Newcomb tried to turn over on his side, as though to squirm away from the accusation. He could not move.

Stunned, as much by the complete failure of his body, which was of course expected, as by the accusation, which was totally unexpected, Dr. Newcomb did not hear Robert's key in the lock of the front door. What he did hear, however, was the series of smaller sounds that followed: Robert's footsteps, as he moved across the sitting room below, to the hat rack beside the kitchen door; the faint slap as Robert hung away his fedora; the slightly sharper rattle as Robert set his cane in the corner of the room; the creak of the kitchen floor as Robert walked out to swathe himself in the apron with which he always protected his faultlessly cut lounge suit while preparing his father's dinner.

The tuned up Ear-O-Phonic, which Mr. Holley had said was now capable of functioning as well as when it was new, had done better than that. In this moment of death, it had brought an abstraction to vivid life.

Those small sounds below were not being made by a criminal brought at last to the bar of justice. Those small sounds — cherished without knowledge as well as beyond reason, valued unawares as well as above justice, more beloved than any yardsticks of decency or reason or duty could assess — were the bits and pieces of a human life. And that human life, for all its dark hair going gray at the temples, in spite of its features and figure blunted by a lifetime of excess, was still Dr. Newcomb's own flesh and blood.

Dissolute and warped, heartless and despicable, that flesh and blood were still to the father what they could never be to judge and jury: an infant whose guileless eyes held no hint of crime, a child whose innocent smile gave no promise of debauchery, a boy of fifteen whose effortless grace had once made him the best dancer in northern Michigan.

What did it matter that Robert's life and Robert's character belied his appearance? What did it matter that Robert had never been entitled to look like that? What did anything matter in the face of the overwhelming fact that Robert, whom Dr. Newcomb had just delivered into the hands of vengeance and retribution, was his own son?

Who was he to question the unknown factors in the equation of life? By what right had he assumed the powers of executioner? Was he not, by his failure to rear an honorable son, actually responsible for shielding his son from, rather than committing him to, the consequences of that failure?

There was still time. Robert was only a boy. A mere child, really. It was never too late. Perhaps, if he had another chance, if they *both* had another chance —

"Robert," Dr. Newcomb cried weakly, struggling to rise from the bed, to make audible what sounded so brutally like nothing more than a whimpering plea for forgiveness. And then, as the heavy footsteps began their furious, purposeful descent — down the back stairs, from the floor above, in which decency and justice had been outraged; toward the kitchen below, where indecency and injustice busied themselves unsuspectingly over the preparations for a meal that would never be eaten — Dr. Newcomb succeeded in raising himself on one elbow.

"Robert!" he cried again, sending out, on the last shreds of breath left in his shattered body, the scream of warning that came not from the brain, which provides the answers, but from the heart, which asks no questions, "*Robert, watch out! Watch out!*"

It seemed odd to Dr. Newcomb that, even though he had not removed the ivory receiving button from his ear, he did not hear his own scream.

Every Morning

"Yes, Mrs. Hicks; no, Mrs. Hicks . . ." It was hell to have to stand there, acting polite, not being able to touch her . . .

BY RICHARD MARSTEN

HE SANG SOFTLY to himself as he worked on the long white beach. He could see the pleasure craft scooting over the deep blue waters, could see the cottony clouds moving leisurely across the wide expanse of sky. There was a mild breeze in the air, and it touched the wooly skullcap that was his hair, caressed his brown skin. He worked with a long rake, pulling at the tangled sea vegetation that the norther had tossed onto the sand. The sun was strong, and the sound of the sea was good, and he was almost happy as he worked.

He watched the muscles ripple on his long brown arms as he pulled at the rake. She would not like it if the beach were dirty. She liked the beach to be sparkling white and clean . . . the way her skin was.

"Jonas!"

He heard the call, and he turned his head toward the big house. He felt the same panic he'd felt a hundred times before. He could feel the trembling start in his hands, and he turned back to the rake, wanting to stall as long as he could, hoping she would not call again, but knowing she would.

"Jonas! Jo-naaaas!"

The call came from the second floor of the house, and he knew it came from her bedroom, and he knew she was just rising, and he knew exactly what would happen if he went up there. He hated what was about to happen, but at the same time it excited him. He clutched the rake more tightly, telling himself he would not answer her call, lying to himself because he knew he would go if she called one more time.

"Jonas! Where the devil are you?"

"Coming, Mrs. Hicks," he shouted.

He sighed deeply and put down the rake. He climbed the concrete steps leading from the beach, and then he walked past the barbecue pit and the beach house, moving under the Australian pines that lined the beach. The pine needles were soft under his feet, and though he knew the pines were planted to form a covering over the sand, to stop sand from being tracked into the house, he still enjoyed the soft feel under his shoes. For an instant, he wished he were barefoot, and then he scolded himself for having a thought that was strictly "native."

He shook his head and climbed the steps to the screened back porch of the house. The hibiscus climbed the screen in a wild array of color, pinks and reds and orchids. The smaller bougainvillea reached up for the sun where it splashed down through the pines. He closed the door behind him and walked through the dim cool interior of the house, starting up the steps to her bedroom.

When he reached her door, he paused outside, and then he knocked discreetly.

"Is that you, Jonas?"

"Yes, Mrs. Hicks."

"Well, come in."

He opened the door and stepped into the bedroom. She was sitting in bed, the sheet reaching to her waist. Her long blond hair spilled over her shoulders, trailing down her back. She wore a white nylon gown, and he could see the mounds of her breasts beneath the gown, could see the erect rosebuds of her nipples. Hastily, he lowered his eyes.

"Good morning, Jonas," she said.

"Good morning, Mrs. Hicks."

"My, it's a beautiful morning, isn't it?"

"Yes, Mrs. Hicks."

"Where were you when I called, Jonas?"

"On the beach, Mrs. Hicks."

"Swimming, Jonas?" She lifted one eyebrow archly, and a tiny smile curled her mouth.

"Oh, no, Mrs. Hicks. I was raking up the . . ."

"Haven't you ever felt like taking a swim at that beach, Jonas?"

He did not answer. He stared at his shoes, and he felt his hands clench at his sides.

"Jonas?"

"Yes, Mrs. Hicks?"

"Haven't you ever felt like taking a swim at that beach?"

"There's lots of places to swim, Mrs. Hicks."

"Yes." The smile expanded. Her green eyes were smiling now, too. She sat in bed like a slender cat, licking her chops. "That's what I like about Nassau. There are lots of places to swim." She continued smiling for a moment, and then she sat up straighter, as if she were ready for business now.

"Well," she said, "what shall we have for breakfast? Has the cook come in, Jonas?"

"Yes, Mrs. Hicks."

"Eggs, I think. Coddled. And some toast and marmalade. And a little juice." He made a movement toward the door, and she stopped him with a wave of her hand. "Oh, there's no rush, Jonas. Stay. I want you to help me."

He swallowed, and he put his hands behind his back to hide the trembling. "Yes . . . Mrs. Hicks."

She threw back the sheet, and he saw her long legs beneath the hem of the short nightgown. She reached for her slippers on the floor near her bed, squirmed her feet into them, and then stood up. Luxuriantly, she stretched her arms over her head and yawned. The nightgown tightened across her chest, lifting as she raised her arms, showing more of the long curve of her legs. She walked to the window and threw open the blinds, and the sun splashed through the gown, and he saw the full outline of her body, and he thought: *Every morning, every morning the same thing.*

He could feel the sweat beading his brow, and he wanted to get out of that room, wanted to get far away from her and her body, wanted to escape this labyrinth that led to one exit alone.

"Ahhhhhhhhh." She let out her breath and then walked across the room to her dressing table. She sat and crossed her legs, and he could see the whiter area on her thigh that the sun never reached. And looking at that whiter stretch of flesh, his own skin felt browner.

"Do you like working for me?" she asked suddenly.

"Yes, Mrs. Hicks," he said quickly.

"You don't really, though, do you?"

"I like it, Mrs. Hicks," he said.

"I like you to work for me, Jonas. I wouldn't have you leave for anything in the world. You know that, don't you, Jonas?"

"Yes, Mrs. Hicks."

There has to be a way out, he

thought. *There has to be some way. A way other than the one . . . the one . . .*

"Have you ever thought of quitting this job, Jonas?"

"No, Mrs. Hicks," he lied.

"That's sensible, you know. Not quitting, I mean. It wouldn't be wise for you to quit, would it, Jonas? Aside from the salary, I mean, which is rather handsome, wouldn't you say, Jonas?"

"It's a handsome salary," he said.

"Yes. But aside from that, aside from losing the salary if you quit. I wouldn't like you to quit, Jonas. I would let Mr. Hicks know of my displeasure, and my husband is really quite a powerful man, you know that, don't you?"

"Yes, Mrs. Hicks."

"It might be difficult for you to get work afterwards, I mean if you ever decided to leave me. Heaven knows, there's not much work for Bahamians as it is. And Mr. Hicks is quite powerful, knowing the Governor and all, isn't that right, Jonas?"

When he did not answer, she giggled suddenly.

"Oh, we're being silly. You like the job, and I like you, so why should we talk of leaving?" She paused. "Has my husband gone to the club?"

"Yes, Mrs. Hicks."

"Good," she said. "Come do my hair, Jonas."

"I . . ."

"Come do my hair," she said slowly and firmly.

"Y . . . yes, Mrs. Hicks."

She held out the brush to him, and he took it and then placed himself behind her chair. He could see her face in the mirror of the dressing table, could see the clean sweep of her throat, and beneath that the first rise of her breasts where the neck of the gown ended. She tilted her head back and her eyes met his in the mirror.

"Stroke evenly now, Jonas. And gently. Remember. Gently."

He began stroking her hair. He watched her face as he stroked, not wanting to watch it, but knowing that he was inside the trap now, and knowing that he had to watch her face, had to watch her lips part as he stroked, had to watch the narrowing of those green eyes. Every morning, every morning the same thing, every morning driving him out of his mind with her body and her glances, always daring him, always challenging him, and always reminding him that it could not be. He stroked, and her breath came faster in her throat, and he watched the animal pleasure on her face as the brush bristles searched her scalp.

And as he stroked, he thought again of the only way out, and he wondered if he had the courage to do it, wondered if he could ever muster the courage to stop all this, stop it finally and irrevocably. She counted softly as he stroked, and her voice was a whisper, and he continued to think of what he must do to end it, and he felt the great fear

within him, but he knew he could not take much more of this, not every morning, and he knew he could not leave the job because she would make sure there would never be work for him again.

But even knowing all this, the way out was a drastic one, and he wondered what it would be like without her hair to brush every morning, without the sight of her body, without the soft caress of her voice.

Death, he thought.

Death.

"That's enough, Jonas," she said.

He handed her the brush. "I'll tell the cook, Mrs. Hicks, to . . ."

"No, stay."

He looked at her curiously. She always dismissed him after the brushing. Her eyes always turned cold and forbidding then, as if she had had her day's sport and was then ready to end the farce . . . until the next morning.

"I think something bit me yesterday. An insect, I think," she said. "I wonder if you'd mind looking. You natives . . . what I mean, you'd probably be familiar with it."

She stood up and walked toward him, and then she began unbuttoning the yoke neck of her gown. He watched her in panic, not knowing whether to flee or stand, knowing only that he would have to carry out his plan after this, knowing that she would go further and further unless it were ended, and knowing that only he could end it, in the only possible way open for him.

He watched her take the hem of her gown in her fingers and pull it up over her waist. He saw the clean whiteness of her skin, and then she pulled the gown up over her back, turning, her breasts still covered, bending.

"In the center of my back, Jonas, do you see it?"

She came closer to him, and he was wet with perspiration now. He stared at her back, the fullness of her buttocks, the impression of her spine against her flesh.

"There's . . . there's nothing, Mrs. Hicks," he said. "Nothing."

She dropped the gown abruptly, and then turned to face him, the smile on her mouth again, the yoke of the gown open so that he could see her breasts plainly.

"Nothing?" she asked, smiling. "You saw nothing, Jonas?"

"Nothing, Mrs. Hicks," he said, and he turned and left her, still smiling, her hands on her hips.

He slit his wrists with a razor blade the next morning. He watched the blood stain the sand on the beach he'd always kept so clean, and he felt a strange inner peace possess him as the life drained out of him.

The native police did not ask many questions when they arrived, and Mrs. Hicks did not offer to show them her torn and shredded nightgown, or the purple bruises on her breasts and thighs.

She hired a new caretaker that afternoon.

Some Things Never Change

AS THE CAB turned into the familiar street, Kerrigan had a momentary feeling that he had never been away from London at all.

It's the rain, he thought. It rained the first time you ever slept with Helen Strickland, and it rained the last time, and now you've come back and you're trying to kid yourself that everything will be the same. Even though you know it won't.

The cab stopped. Kerrigan paid the driver, swung a worn but expensive pig-

BY ROBERT PATRICK WILMOT

Helen said she was going to leave her husband. She didn't bother to mention that her husband was dead.

skin bag out on the wet sidewalk and carried it easily toward the cafe, a stooped, heavy-shouldered big man, his jaws and waistline faintly cushioned with soft flesh, his crow-black hair brushed with grey. Rain slashed his cheeks as he pushed open the grimy glass door, and a gust of night wind followed him into the room. The sudden burst of air made ragged plumes of the smoke clouds hanging over a long bar and a score of tables. The smell of the place, a hot wave of stale smoke, alcohol, sweat and cheap perfume, washed over Kerrigan.

Helen Strickland was not among the thirty or forty customers who were drinking at tables and along the bar. As Kerrigan went on to the rear of the room, the bartender turned his head slightly to follow him. Looking back, Kerrigan saw that the man behind the bar was a little like the Kerrigan of fifteen years before: a lean, hard man without an ounce of excess weight on the tapering wedge of his body, an expressionless face in which the cold grey eyes were set deeply.

Kerrigan grinned at him, crookedly. The cold gaze slid away from him as the bartender turned and spoke to a girl who stood at his side.

The girl nodded and walked around from behind the bar, moving towards Kerrigan with the grace of an animal. She was fairly tall and slim, wearing a thin black dress like a second skin. The mechanical smile she gave Kerrigan was like the flash of an identification badge.

"Good evening, sir," she said. "Would you like me to put your luggage away while you have something to drink?"

Sweat was slick on the palms of his hands, but when he spoke to the girl his face was composed. "I don't want anything to drink, thanks. I'm looking for a lady."

"I'm very ladylike, if I try," the girl said. She took a step nearer, reaching out for the bag. Her body brushed his. "My name is Anna." Her voice was a whisper. "You are Canadian? American? I like Americans very much. We could have fun together, you and I. You'll find me very reasonable, considering how much everything costs now."

Kerrigan smiled and the girl stepped back "I'll bet you're just wonderful," he said. "But I told you I was looking for someone else. The lady's name is Helen Strickland — or was, until she married a man named Crane. If you know where I can find her, say so."

The thin pencil line of the girl's eyebrows arched, and fear pulled the red mouth into a bow. "You're Mr. Kerrigan?"

"I'm Mr. Kerrigan."

Her face was a mask. "If you'll step this way, sir." She turned abruptly and walked off. Kerrigan followed her through a door at the rear of the cocktail lounge, down a passageway and into an empty and unlighted stone lobby. It was, he realized, the foyer of an apartment building. In the dim light from out-

side he made out an open door. The girl nodded toward it.

"You'd better take the lift. It's four flights up, the top floor." She moved to the door, flicked a switch. In the pale glow of a single naked bulb her face was the color of dirty wax.

Kerrigan stepped past her, into the elevator. Her hand touched his sleeve and then she seemed to flow against him. He could feel her breast move against his chest as she breathed. Her voice was low and urgent:

"Please. You won't have any fun up there. I know. Have fun here, now, with me. I like you, very much. Please."

The pigskin bag thudded to the floor. Kerrigan dug the fingers of his left hand into the flesh above the girl's breast and used the other hand to slap her, once, hard across the mouth. "What do you know about me?"

The girl said nothing. Kerrigan waited for his answer. Grinning tightly, automatically, he brought his left hand away and chopped at her with the side of his palm. He heard her gasp with pain. "Come on," he said. "Talk. What do you know about me?"

She backed away to the wall of the elevator and stood pressed against it. "I don't know much," she said. "I know you knew Helen here in England, during the war. You wrote her letters, called her from America . . ."

"What else do you know?" Kerrigan made a motion with his hand, and the grin reappeared on his face as she began to talk again.

"Nothing. Nothing. Her husband is very angry about the letters and calls. They've had fights. Everybody knows that."

"Bert Crane?"

"Yes. She married him a year ago."

"I know that. Is he upstairs now?"

"I haven't seen him, not since yesterday," the girl said. "Maybe he's up there, drinking. He usually is."

She stopped. Kerrigan said, "All right. I guess that's your piece. Get out." He grabbed her shoulder and pushed her out into the foyer. As the door closed he could hear her moving away.

Just before the elevator stopped Kerrigan heard a sound as if a door had been slammed. He didn't know where the sound came from. He forgot it, stepping out of the cage and reaching for the doorbell button beside the only door he saw. He heard it chime thinly in the distance. After a minute he pushed it again, harder.

Then the door swung open.

Kerrigan stood motionless, remembering the near-perfection of her face and body. She hadn't changed. Helen Strickland was tall, and the features framed by her flowing red hair were almost classically regular. But her mouth was sensuous and warmly curved, a mouth like a scarlet flower, as restless and pro-

vocative as her grey-green eyes. Kerrigan's gaze moved downward along the smooth pale column of her throat to the ripe breasts that rose to sharp crimson-tipped peaks against her negligee, down all the perfect curves of her body . . .

His features relaxed and tightened again. She smiled and took a step toward him, holding out both her hands.

"Darling, you made it." Her voice was still the clipped British speech he'd never gotten used to. "I couldn't believe you would. Even after I got your radiogram, I couldn't believe you were really on your way here."

"You asked me to come," Kerrigan said. "Where's Crane? Do you want me to talk to him now?"

"He's not here. He's gone to Blackpool for the weekend. Put down your bag and let me fix you a drink."

"I don't want a drink." The bag slid to the floor. He caught Helen by the wrist and pulled her against him. He lifted her in his arms.

Her cool voice said, "Wait. Wait, please."

"Wait?" Kerrigan laughed, a hoarse, guttural sound. "I've waited for ten years!" There was a couch in one corner of the room. Helen in his arms, Kerrigan strode to it. The negligee came away in his hands.

And as he put his arms around her her fingernails ripped and slashed at his cheeks. He jerked back and felt someone standing behind him. Turning, he saw the unsmiling bartender towering over him.

Helen said, very quietly, "Hit him, Eddie." Kerrigan moved, but a fist cracked against his jaw and the bright room rocked and roared crazily.

He never went out completely, but sprawled back against the couch, unable to move. He saw Helen, across the room now, snatch a black automatic from a drawer. She ran to the bartender and put it in his hand.

"Now do what you're supposed to do." Her voice was tight with panic. "We haven't got any time to waste."

"We've got enough time." The bartender balanced the gun in his hand. "I guess you know what the score is, don't you, Doc?" he asked Kerrigan quietly.

"How would I know?" Kerrigan asked. His voice was steady. "She telephoned me in New York and asked me to come over. She said she was going to leave her husband. Just where is he, by the way?"

"Dead, I hope," the bartender said. "At least, I hope the son of a bitch is dead."

"He's dead, all right," Helen said. "As of a couple of minutes ago. And everybody's going to think you did it, Kerrigan. Everybody's going to think that." Her voice tightened again when she spoke to the man with the gun. "Come on, Eddie, get it over with. Anyone might have heard the shot I fired."

"Nobody heard it, away up here."

The man called Eddie turned back to Kerrigan. "I'll fill you in, Doc," he said. "You might as well know why I've got to do this. Like Helen said, you're supposed to have killed Crane. Our story is, you come up here and fought with him, and in the fight you killed him. Then I come up here, because she's told me she's scared of you. I take the gun away from you. I shoot you when you jump me. It's a simple story. The police will have to believe it."

"I saved your letters, Kerrigan," Helen said. "I saved every bloody stupid one of them. I can show the police the one you wrote threatening to kill me and my husband — and yourself, too, remember? — when you found out I'd married Bert Crane. And I can show them all the others. You wrote you didn't want to live without me. Remember, Kerrigan?"

Kerrigan kept his eyes on the man with the gun. "What did you do?" he asked. "Did you telephone her from downstairs when I came up?"

Eddie nodded. "That's right. You walked into it. When I got into the foyer Anna was standing around. She says you slapped her around. She says she thinks you're crazy, and that I should hurry up before somebody gets hurt. Her story'll sound good to the cops, too. You really loaded the dice against yourself, Doc."

Kerrigan's dry lips curved in a smile. "And what are you going to do afterwards? Marry her and live happily ever after on Crane's dough? Is that what you think? Do you know what she'll do to you — do you know what she's done to me?"

"He knows what I've done," Helen said. "Eddie, you know the way we set it up. I took care of Bert. Now you take care of *him.* Go on and get it over with."

"I think you'd better know all about us, Eddie," Kerrigan kept talking. "You really better know. I was a Captain in the Army, stationed here in 1943. Helen was only a kid when I met her, but it didn't make any difference to me. Nothing made any difference to the way I felt. Not even that she was a chippy."

"You had it bad." The tone of Eddie's voice told Kerrigan nothing at all. His best chance was to keep talking.

"I had it so bad I didn't even have the manhood to kick her teeth in when she cheated me with my best friend. I came in unexpectedly one night and found them. Only not in bed. Not when I got there. She was standing over him with my gun in her hand. She'd shot him in the head. They were both drunk. She'd been going through his pockets when he woke up and slugged her. The shot didn't kill him. It blinded him for life."

"And you took the rap for her," Eddie said.

"I took it for her. They tried to pin it where it belonged — with my pal's help — but I made them be-

lieve I'd shot him in a drunken quarrel. I did five years in a military prison. Five years is a long time."

Eddie's eyes were slits in a bronze face. "Long enough," he said. "Why didn't you come over here when you got out?"

Kerrigan made a weary gesture. "It was a question of money. I saved up enough, twice, to send for Helen, but she took the money and never came. Even after that I kept writing. I had it bad. Like you said. Then she telephoned me and said she wanted me to come over, so I came."

Eddie moved closer. "With a record like yours, Doc," he said, "how come you've got a passport? Maybe it's a phony." There was a sudden interest alive in his eyes.

"The passport's good," Kerrigan said. "My pal stirred up some big boys after I got out, and they gave me my citizenship back. It's all genuine."

"So you got a good passport," Eddie said. His face was alive now; excitement showed on it dimly. "And because you're a foreigner, the British made you buy a round-trip ticket, too. A passport, and a ticket back to New York."

The bartender took a quick step forward. The muzzle of the pistol touched Kerrigan's chest. In a low voice he went on: "I might have a chance. With the passport and the ticket, I might have an outside chance to get away. If I had my hair cut like yours, put some streaks of grey in it, maybe I could get out."

Helen's voice cut in. There was anger in it, and fear. "Have you gone crazy, Eddie? After he's found dead here, how are you going to use his passport? Later, if we decide to leave England, you'll have no trouble getting one, as a Canadian. But —"

"Canadian?" Eddie backed off, swinging the automatic so that it covered both Kerrigan and the woman. "I'm as American as Kerrigan. I've been on the run since '44 — that's the only difference. I picked up my identity card and papers from a dead Canuck, but if anybody bothered to make a real check I'd be picked up then and there. I'm still a long way from being safe."

Kerrigan asked, "You were in the American Army?"

Eddie nodded. "You don't have to know about that. Anyhow, there was something else. Her name was Kay and I was as crazy about her as you are about this one."

Kerrigan saw the sweat shining on the bartender's face.

"I couldn't marry her," Eddie said. "I couldn't marry her because she already had husband, and the son of a bitch wouldn't give her a divorce. When I went over the hill she went with me. It was the real thing with us. When things got really bad, she — hustled. To keep me alive. She got pneumonia from sleeping out one night, and she died."

Helen's voice cut in. "You never told me anything about that, anything at all."

Eddie was staring past Kerrigan,

over the barrel of the levelled pistol. "Why should I?" he said. "What would a tramp like you care about us? You think I ever trusted you? Do you think I'd trust a lousy twist that would take a guy the first night she met him, with her husband drunk right in the next room?"

"You went along with the plan to get rid of Bert," Helen snapped. "You even told me you loved me. How many times?"

"Sure, I told you. And I went along with the plan. Because maybe the plan would give me a chance to get out of the country. You've got a million dollars' worth of body, Helen, and I used the million dollars' worth. What else do you think?"

Kerrigan was surprised to hear himself suddenly say, "All right, Eddie. Why don't you do it?" Everything fell into place; this was the only solution, he realized. "Just blast us both and go. With my bag and passport, with my ticket, you'd have a chance."

"I'd have a good chance. You know that?" Eddie told the woman. "This is Friday night. The cleaning woman won't come up here until Tuesday. Four whole days."

Helen's voice had a constricted sound, as if she'd given way entirely to panic. "Don't be a bloody fool. You wouldn't have a chance, Eddie. Don't listen to him; he's sick, he wants to die, he wants me to die too. Eddie — please. I love you, Eddie. I love you."

He didn't seem to have heard her. He stood staring at the gun in his hand. "I could go downstairs," he said, "and tell them you'd all gone away. Nobody would come nosing up here. They'd all be glad to believe me."

Kerrigan said, "You could put the gun in my hand. With my prints on it, you'd be safe. Even if they caught you you could say that you found us here dead, that you took my passport because you wanted to go home."

Words tumbled out of Helen's throat now, quick words that stopped suddenly when Eddie's gaze wavered and Kerrigan moved. He grabbed a cushion from the couch and threw it at Eddie. A bronze book-end was in his hand. He whipped it away. The book-end thudded against Eddie's jaw. Kerrigan charged.

As his clubbed right fist hacked down at the gun-hand he felt Helen's nails slashing at his face again. Without looking back he sent her sprawling. Kerrigan brought a knee up into Eddie's groin and watched the man collapse, screaming, the gun forgotten. Kerrigan picked up the gun and stood in the center of the room.

Slowly he recovered enough breath to speak. "I'm sorry, Eddie," he said. "I know how persuasive Helen can be. I figured you might weaken." A grin creased his face. "I'm kind of glad I didn't let you start out with my passport. Because I'm a pretty hot article in New York. I killed a man, took money from his safe, to

get over here. They'll have found the body by now, and if you got off the plane with my passport the cops would be on you in a minute. You'd be caught one way or the other."

Eddie stood up slowly. He backed to the door and went out without a word. Kerrigan watched him go.

The door closed. Helen stood up, calmly watching him now, moving toward him with a sensuous grace. "Nobody really wants to die, Kerrigan," she said. "Nobody ever really wants to die. We could make a deal, you and I. We could be together again. I've got enough money to get us out of England before anyone finds Bert . . ."

"Where would we go?" Kerrigan said.

"Kerrigan —" her voice remained perfectly calm — "I can change, Kerrigan. Everything changes, you know that."

"Some things never change," Kerrigan said. His eyes were cold and grey. His face was set in stone. "Like you'd never stop liking them lean and young. Like I'd never stop loving you. Some things don't change."

Kerrigan touched her shoulder with his hand and gave her a gentle little push. "Just lie down on the couch, baby," he said slowly, "just lie down, right there." He patted the couch with the automatic.

Kerrigan did not relax his grip on the gun as he lowered his body to her side. She screamed, then, knowing what he was going to do to her, and the scream turned into an unbroken, throbbing shriek of horror as the barrel of the pistol moved like a blunt finger against her skin.

Portrait of a Killer

No. 13—Leon Peltzer

BY DAN SONTUP

He was a salesman, and he traveled quite a bit—and he lived up to almost every old joke about traveling salesmen. But, even though Leon Peltzer had a lousy reputation for running around with women and getting into debt, it was his brother's affair with a married woman that set the stage for Leon's first and only murder.

Leon's brother Armand had the brains in the family, and also the money. So, when Armand found himself wanting a woman whose husband wouldn't give her up, he decided the only thing left to do was to get rid of the husband. That's where Leon came in.

Leon, as usual, needed money, and Armand knew this. He also knew that Leon would go along with him if they had a fool-proof method of murder. Leon wasn't very smart, but he also wasn't dumb enough to fall for a murder scheme that would put his neck in a noose. Even so, Armand had to make sure that Leon would never be caught; for, if Leon were arrested for the crime, then Armand would be dragged into it, too. So, after a lot of thought and planning, Armand came up with his fool-proof scheme, and it made use of one of the oldest and corniest ideas in crime—a disguise.

Armand got in touch with Leon and gave him the pitch on the entire scheme, promising him enough money to pay off his debts with a lot left over for himself if Leon would kill for Armand. Leon agreed quite readily.

Two things were in their favor—Armand could make sure that he had an unbreakable alibi since, as the lover of the woman whose husband they were going to kill, Armand would be the prime suspect; and, secondly, Armand and Leon hadn't seen too much of each other for many years, and none of Armand's friends even knew he had a brother. With this as a starting point, they set out to kill the husband of Mrs. Bernays, Armand's girl friend.

The first step was to set up the disguise for Leon. Since Leon was short, they decided upon lifts in his shoes to make him seem taller. Since he was slim, padding to make him look fatter was needed. Since his hair was black, a red wig would take care of this, and he could grow a mustache and dye it red to match

the wig. Since he didn't wear glasses, a pair of thick-lens glasses were added. And, since he had nice, white teeth, some discolored artificial teeth would cover them.

The next step would be to obtain the materials for the disguise, and this called for still another disguise before Leon could pick up all the stuff. Leon dyed his black hair brown and put on a pair of ordinary glasses. Then he went to a theatrical costumer, told them his name was Kraus and that he was an actor who had been given the part of an Englishman in a play. He then ordered a red wig, dye for the mustache he hadn't grown yet, lifts for his shoes, thick glasses, padding for his clothing, an English tweed suit, and a set of false teeth which were yellow and discolored.

Meanwhile, Armand had taken some letters which Leon had written and dated in advance. These letters were supposed to be from Leon to Armand, and they would serve as Leon's alibi if the police were ever able to crack his disguise. Armand arranged with some friends of his in distant cities to mail the letters to him on specified dates, explaining to them that it was a sort of practical joke. Thus, if the police searched Armand's apartment — as he was sure they would — they'd find letters to him from Leon, postmarked from distant cities, and these letters would give Leon an alibi for the time of the murder.

Armand wasn't taking any chances. He knew that, if he were to be investigated, the police would probably find out he had a brother, and the letters were supposed to prove that Leon, the brother, wasn't anywhere near the scene of the crime.

Next, Leon — wearing the disguise of a red-headed Englishman with a red mustache and thick glasses and bad teeth — took the name of Vaughn and started traveling. He stayed at hotels, being careful to keep all the hotel bills. Then he rented a small apartment under the name of Vaughn in a city not too far from where Bernays lived, and he put through a phone call to Bernays, asking him to come and see him because he had some information about Bernays' wife and another man. Bernays, who hated Armand and knew that he was fooling around with his wife, took the next train out to see Leon.

When Bernays arrived, Leon made him comfortable in a chair — then pulled out a gun and shot him in the head.

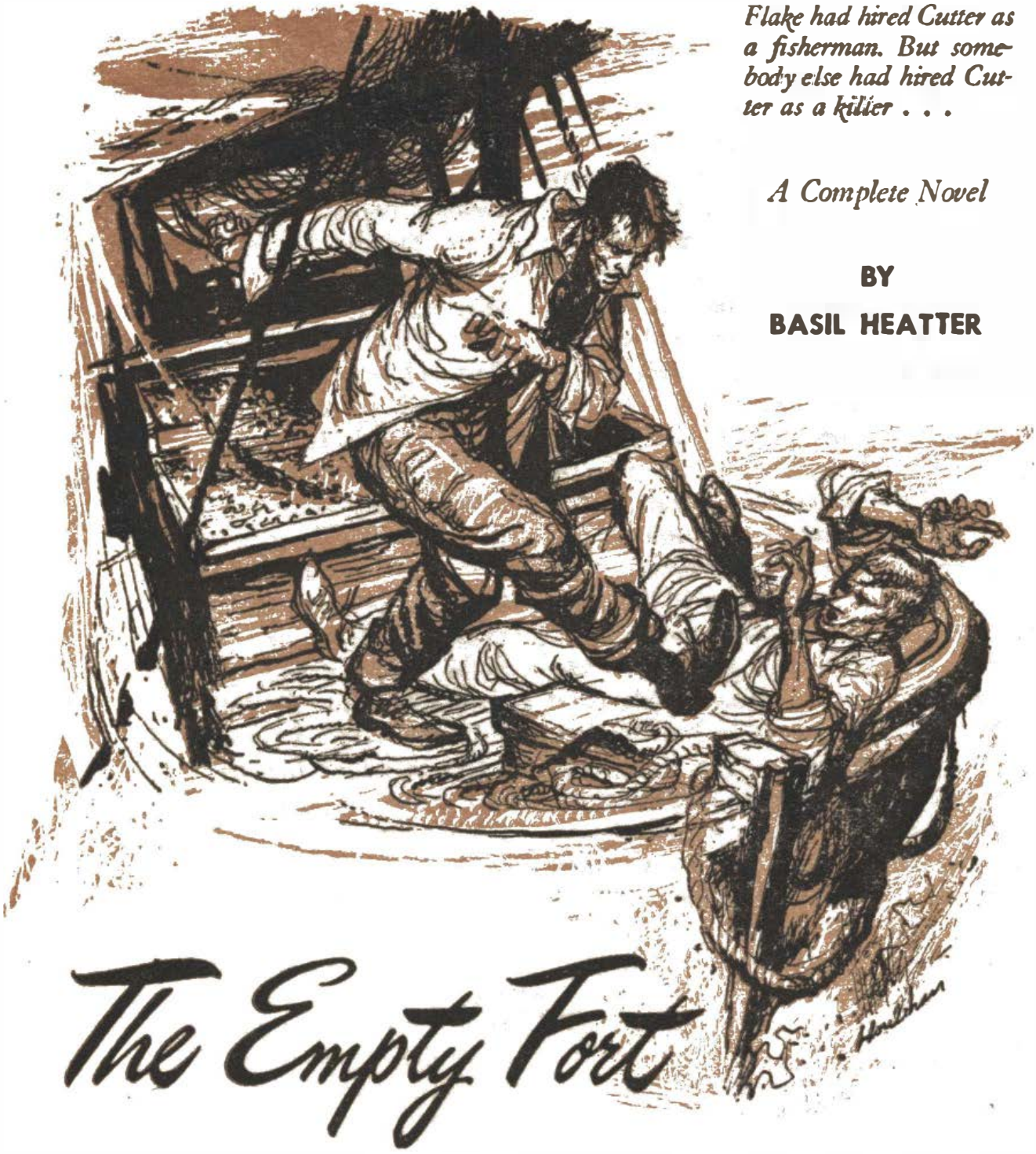
After this, Leon cleaned the apartment thoroughly, removed most of his disguise, and went to another apartment he had rented in his real name of Leon Peltzer. However, just in case the police tried to compare him with the man who had purchased the theatrical costume, Leon still wore the discolored teeth (since he had appeared at the theatrical store with his own perfectly white teeth), and he also left

the lifts in his shoes. Thus, while the people who had sold Leon the outfit would describe him as a short man, with brown hair, white teeth, and wearing glasses, Leon was now a man of medium height, with discolored teeth, black hair, and no glasses. And, of course, the red-headed Englishman named Vaughn would very conveniently disappear from sight — with the exception of the hotel bills under the name of Vaughn which Leon had left in the murder apartment in order to throw the police off the track.

All this complicated double-disguise *did* throw the police off the track — but only for a while. Routine investigation disclosed that Armand was now seeing Mrs. Bernays openly, and they also tailed Armand to the apartment of his brother. The police, also, had long ago figured that the man who went by the name of Vaughn was a phony, using an assumed name and a disguise of sorts. Nevertheless, they tracked down all the hotel leads on Vaughn, questioned everybody they could, and had even found the store where "Kraus" had purchased the Vaughn disguise. Even though neither Armand nor Leon fitted the description of Kraus, the police soon caught on to the fact that still another disguise was being used. They immediately eliminated Armand because of his alibi, which involved reputable witnesses, and that left only Leon.

The police picked him up, questioned him, confronted him with the fact that he was now wearing discolored teeth and lifts in his shoes, and began piling up all the evidence they had against him. Leon broke down quickly under the routine questioning.

Even though Leon had been the man who pulled the trigger, Armand was found equally guilty of the crime of murder, and both of them were executed — without benefit of any disguise at all.



Flake had hired Cutter as a fisherman. But somebody else had hired Cutter as a killer . . .

A Complete Novel

BY

BASIL HEATTER

The Empty Fort

THERE was the hot blue sea and the scrubbed white coral and on top of that the fort. There was sun-blasted brick spattered with bird droppings and an overgrown parade ground and the long, civil-war-type cannon that had rusted away without having been fired. The gun emplacements stared out at the sea like empty eye-sockets and the warm rain blew through it all and the sun nibbled the mortar

away from the bricks. The roofs had crumbled away but the six-foot-thick walls remained hunched and waiting for an enemy that had never come.

No one could remember now just why or how they had come to build it in that place that was dry as dust, where they had to bring the water in kegs from the mainland over two hundred miles away. In Key West you can hear about how the bricks were brought down from Boston in lighters and were six months traveling. And of how the men who went out to build the fort and to live there came from God knew where. And of how most of them died. The story is that for every brick there was a life. That would be an awful lot of lives but they might be about half right at that.

In the end they had to abandon it because of the yellow fever, and there it stands.

2.

I got to stop sleeping in the street, Cruze told himself. It's cold now. It's getting on to be winter and even here in Key West it's damn cold. And the nights are long. I bet you if I opened my eyes I'd find the sun isn't up yet. In the summer it comes up early and you can feel the heat on the stones but the way it is now you can't hardly tell the difference.

Maybe you think I can't open my eyes if I want to but I'll tell you right now you're wrong, buddy. I can open my eyes any time I want to. I got perfect control over my eyes. But why the hell should I? Just to please you? What have you ever done for me? I'll keep them shut. You can go to hell, buddy.

He hunched up tighter in the doorway and hugged himself but there was no warmth in his arms. He was all bone anyway. The whiskey had eaten the flesh off him.

He dozed a little and then somebody was kicking him and without opening his eyes he said, "Yes, sir. Just resting, sir. Moving on right now."

"Wake up," Flake said.

Cruze opened his eyes. The sun hurt them and he closed them. When he opened them again Flake was still standing over him.

"Get up, rummy," Flake said.

Cruze sighed and pulled himself together. He got up in sections, unfolding his stiff-legged length like a collapsible toy.

"What do you want, Flake?"

"I'll buy you a cup of joe."

"Well, I don't know," Cruze started to say but Flake took him by the collar and dragged him off down the street. Cruze was a head taller but Flake could have carried him easily under one arm.

They went down the street to the Cuban place in back of the turtle pens and there were ten drunks sitting on the bench like chickens on a roost. They were

sitting there soaking in the sun and holding each other up. They had been there all night or maybe forever. Flake could not remember when they had not been there.

He put his wide shouldered bulk through the sagging doorway and dragged Cruze after him. He ordered coffee for two and eggs and sausage for himself. The rummy made an effort to drink his coffee; he held the cup in both hands but it was no use; he shook uncontrollably.

"Give him a beer," Flake said to the girl.

"What kind?"

"Any kind. Schlitz."

The girl brought the bottle. Cruze picked it up in both hands and let the cold beer pour down his throat. His skinny neck worked on the beer and his adam's apple bobbed up and down. He drank the whole thing without stopping. When he had finished he wiped his mouth with the back of a grimy hand and pleaded, "Lemme have another one, Flake."

Flake was eating. Without looking up he said, "No."

"Just one more."

"Goddamit, I said no."

Cruze muttered to himself.

"You want some eggs?" Flake asked.

"No. If I can't have a beer I don't want nothing."

"Then that's what you'll get. Nothing."

They sat in silence while Flake finished his breakfast. After he had cleaned the plate he bought two cigars for fifteen cents and put one in his mouth and lit it and blew a cloud of smoke into Cruze's face. The rummy wrinkled his eyes and coughed.

"What did you do that for?"

"To wake you up."

"I was awake."

"You want your coffee now?"

"Yes."

The girl brought another cup of coffee and this time Cruze was able to drink it.

"What did you want me for, Flake?"

"I'm going out this morning and I need a man."

"You already got a crew."

"I lost Benninger last night."

"How?"

"He got in a knife fight over some tart on Duval Street."

"Is he dead?"

"Not yet."

"You know I can't work. I got the shakes too bad."

"Shakes or no shakes, you can still make a deisel run."

Cruze shook his head. "I think I'll stay ashore."

Flake turned and with a short jolting motion hit him hard on the side of the face with his open hand. The hand was like a piece of wood and made a flat hard sound on the rummy's head.

Cruze fell off the stool and lay on the floor. There were tears in his eyes. His mouth worked. "What did you want to do that for?"

"Get up."

"We don' wan' no fight in here," the Cuban girl said. "I call the cops."

"This isn't a fight," Flake said.

He picked Cruze up and guided him out into the sunshine. "Here's a dollar. Get whatever you need. Meet me at the Gulf docks in half an hour. If you're not there I'll come and get you. You know what that means."

"Okay, Flake."

"You better be there."

"I'll be there."

Flake left the rummy and walked two blocks west and came out on Duval Street. Although the sun had only been up for half an hour they were already playing the piano in Sloppy Joe's and half a dozen sailors were drinking at the bar. The place smelled of whiskey and smoke and sweat.

"Shut up a minute," Flake said to the piano player. "I got to make a phone call."

He called the police station and talked to the duty sergeant and asked about Benninger.

"We just got a report from the hospital," the sergeant said. "He's dead."

Flake didn't say anything.

"Who're his people?" the sergeant asked.

"I don't know. He didn't say."

"Where was he from?"

"He didn't say."

"You didn't ask him?"

"Look," Flake said. "All I know is he was a good man. He worked hard. He didn't give me no trouble. He's dead."

"Okay. Okay," the sergeant said.

Flake hung up. As he was going out the bartender, a thin tubercular man with sideburns and a mustache, said, "Hi, Flake."

"Hi, Johnny."

"How's it goin'?"

"All right. How you doin'?"

"Livin'."

"That's good."

He went on up the street to the marine hardware store and bought three orange colored floats for the nets and a square of copper mesh for the intake strainer. The boy who waited on him was a new boy. Flake had to tell him the name of the boat twice. "*Jezebel*. Owner, Mangio. Captain, Flake."

"Anything else you need, Captain? How about charts?"

"I got my charts."

"For the whole area?"

"For all the way to Mexico."

"You don't fish off Mexico any more, do you?"

"Not any more," Flake said, remembering the leg irons and the rats and the rotting stones in the rotting cell. In bad weather he could still feel the irons. He had been thirty-two days in jail in Campeche for fishing in Mexican territorial waters. That was before they had discovered the Tortugas beds, when the shrimpers were starving, when they had to run to Mexico to try to make a living.

The gunboat had caught him six miles out of Campeche. They had let the crew go but they had put Flake in irons and hauled him off to jail. In the end it had cost him a thousand dollars and the flesh off his ankles. He didn't fish Mexican waters any more.

He took the bundle the boy gave him and put it under his arm and bought a carton of cigarettes in the drugstore and a fifth of Irish whiskey at Joe's and went up the stairs to Mangio's office above the Chink place.

He sat there waiting for Mangio, smelling the Chinese cooking and listening to the distant rumble of the bull horns on the destroyers in the navy yard. Through the window he saw a girl come out of Freddie's. She was a blonde girl and she was a little drunk, teetering unsteadily on her high heels. She went off down the street and he admired the way her bottom moved under the tight blue skirt. He had never seen her before. He wondered if she was the new girl at Mom's.

Mangio came in and said, "What do you know, Flake?"

"I'm ready to sail."

"You get another man?"

Flake nodded.

Mangio was short and plump and wore a pink silk shirt with pearl cuff links. He had started as a bus boy at the Casa Marina. Now he owned three shrimp boats, an icehouse and a big new sea food place out near the Bight. He had pale unhealthy-looking skin and even at this hour the sweat was running down his neck.

"Too bad about the boy who died."

"Yeah."

"He should of stayed away from niggers. They cut you for nothing."

"That's right."

"Who you get to replace him?"

"Cruze."

"The rummy?"

"Yeah."

Mangio shook his head. "That's no good. Rummies bring trouble. He be drunk the whole trip."

"Where else can I get a man on a half hour's notice? He knows them engines as good as anybody."

"I don't like it."

"I'll handle it," Flake said flatly.

Mangio belched loudly. He rubbed his hand over his paunch. "My stomach is killing me."

"You ought to quit eating that Chink food."

"You think is bad?"

"Anything you get too much of is bad."

Mangio grinned and examined the saliva wet end of his cigar. "Except one thing."

"Even that."

Mangio closed his eyes and hugged himself. "Last night . . ." he began.

"Save it till I got more time. I came to see the books."

Mangio opened his eyes. "Books? What books?"

"Account books. I want to know how much dough I got riding."

"Nobody sees the books but me and Uncle Sam."

"All right," Flake said carefully. "Then tell me. How do I stand?"

"I don't know. A couple or three thousand. I ain't looked lately."

"Then look now."

Mangio grinned and belched again. "What's the matter? You don't trust me?"

"Not particularly."

Mangio stood up. "We go over it when you get back."

"Now."

"What's the matter, Flake? You don't like your job? I can get another Captain."

"And I can get another berth. Hunchy has been after me all season."

"You won't get another boat like the *Jezebel*."

"Don't give me that. All shrimp boats are the same. Frig you and your boat." He threw down the package of floats. "Here. These belong to you. You know what you can do with them."

Mangio didn't say anything.

"And I still want to see those books."

"Go to hell," Mangio said.

Flake shot a thick arm across the desk and grabbed the owner by his pink silk collar. Mangio wheezed. His face turned purple. He was trying to get something out of his hip pocket. Flake pinned his wrist and ground the bones together. Mangio tried to scream but there was no wind in him. The knife fell out of his hand. Flake released his grip and shoved the owner back into his chair.

"The books," Flake said.

Mangio was unable to speak. He pointed to the filing cabinet and to the keys on his desk. Flake unlocked the cabinet and found the ledger he wanted. It was an accounting of the *Jezebel's* voyages and the boxes of shrimp she had brought in each time and the market price and the various shares. The rest of the crew had been paid in cash but Flake had let his credit ride. He took a slip of paper out of his pocket and compared it with the book.

"You stinking bastard," he said. "You're eight hundred short."

Mangio started to protest but one look at Flake's face shut him up.

"I want a check for thirty-eight hundred and I want it now."

Mangio wrote out the check. Flake folded it carefully and put it in his ragged black leather wallet.

"And another thing. From now on my share is an extra five per cent."

"There's no other captain gets that much. Why should I pay you more?"

"Because I bring in more shrimp."

Mangio hesitated but then thought better of it and nodded.

Flake picked up his packages. "I guess we understand each other," he said, going out of the office without bothering to close the door.

3.

The sixty-four-foot motor sailer *Irydia* rode to her anchor in the mouth of the government channel. Her sail covers were neatly furled and her teak decks newly scrubbed. Her white topsides shone in the morning sun. Her sheets and halyards were carefully flemished. Her windows, which had been streaked with salt after her voyage from Miami, had now been washed clear with fresh water. She was a tribute to her owner and master, Allan Chambers the second. But that gentleman derived neither pride nor joy from his ship; instead he sat on his bunk with the tears running down his face.

Oh God, he was saying to himself. Oh God help me. Get me off the bloody hook. Make me stand up like a man and throw her out. Don't let me go crawling back to her. She promised. And now you see. She's rotten. And I'm even more rotten because I know in my heart that when she comes on board I'll take her back.

Chambers howled like a dog. A seaman working on deck stood transfixed for a moment listening to the tide of grief welling out of the ventilator and then moved away. He had heard it before.

The cause of Chambers' anguish was the namesake of his boat — Irydia. Irydia was a tall dark girl who had been living with Chambers for a year. She was not Mrs. Chambers. Mrs. Chambers was at this moment attending a dog show in Westchester and feeling the flanks of an Irish terrier. Mrs. Chambers did not know where Mr. Chambers was and did not care. For a long time she had been more interested in dogs than men.

Chambers was a tall man who looked substantially the same as he had when he had rowed stroke in the Princeton shell fifteen years before. His shoulders were still very good although his legs were going a bit thin. He wore his hair cut close to the skull and what with the tan and the J. Press clothes you had to look twice to see that he was no longer a college boy.

In the past few years he had developed a passion for boats. Soon after his wife became interested in dogs he became interested in yachts and he would go off on these ocean races to Bermuda and Nassau and Cat Cay on sixty or seventy foot yawls or ketches and all he talked about was roller reefing and genoas and Merriman hardware.

It was a good life and it kept him healthy and the last thing he ever had to think about was Allan Chambers. He might have gone along that way for years except that he had been struck by lightning in the form of this dark-haired girl Irydia.

Irydia had been married twice. Her first husband had committed suicide by shooting himself in the liver with an incredible amount

of Vat 69. The second, after receiving his mail from home, had volunteered for a patrol through a mine field and they had not even found any pieces of him. All that should have been a warning to Chambers but it was not.

She was a great girl. Everybody who met her was crazy about her. She was pretty and vital and intelligent and warm-hearted and loving and wide-bosomed. But she had one failing — Every so often she liked to spend a night out.

She and Chambers would be sitting at a bar and she would excuse herself and go to the ladies' room and out the back way and that would be the last he would see of her until the next day. He never knew where she went nor whose bed she had been in.

It had happened in Paris and in New York and in Bar Harbor and in Southampton and in Palm Beach and now in Key West. Each time they had a terrible fight about it and Chambers swore to kick her out and she promised that it would not happen again but each time it did and he did not.

That was why he had bought the boat. He had thought that at least on the boat she would not be able to pull any tricks. But somehow she did. She always managed to get ashore. One time when they were anchored well out in the bay she had left him in the night and had taken the dinghy and had rowed half a mile to the city docks and he had not seen her for two days. In his fury he had pulled up the anchor and had gone fourteen miles out of the harbor before he turned back. And when she did return she had been as chic and smiling and affectionate as ever and had refused him any explanation. Underneath, way down, there was iron in her. Chambers had always thought of himself as a strong man but she had taught him that he was a miserable weakling.

He wiped his face and soaked his eyes with a wet towel and went up to the chartroom. The charts were neatly rolled in an overhead rack. He pulled out the one he wanted and studied it carefully. It was a chart of the area between Key West and the Dry Tortugas.

He had never been to the Tortugas but he had heard about it. There was a huge abandoned fort there, Fort Jefferson, that they had made into a national park. It was entirely dry, no water and no accommodations. And there was a lot of historical background, something about confederate prisoners and the famous Dr. Mudd who had set John Wilkes Booth's broken leg and had been imprisoned for his pains. But the best thing about it from Chambers' point of view was that so far as he knew it was completely deserted. Irydia would have a tough time finding a playmate there.

He took a bottle of scotch out of the mahogany side cabinet and

fixed himself a drink. Then, holding the chart in one hand and the glass in the other, he went back to his bunk to wait for her. He was beginning to feel better already.

4.

Irydia was lying on the beach with the sun warm on her and her black hair spread out around her on the towel. She felt marvelous. The sun was always so good for her. She hoped no one would speak to her. She just wanted to lie like this with her eyes closed and the sun burning her bones.

She was thinking about the boy she had met last night, the naval aviator. What a nice boy. Fliers were sometimes difficult but this one was so nice. They were all nice. She loved them all. Allan was nice too. Moody sometimes and childish with his weeping but really very nice. She hoped he wouldn't start drinking again. He was always so proud of his condition and did those pushups and things on deck every morning and drinking would ruin that.

She wondered if the boat would be gone when she got back. There was always that chance. He had tried it once before and some day he would get really angry enough to do it. But not now. He was still too fond of her. Anyway there was not much point in brooding about it. The big thing now was to close her eyes and to let the sun do all these delicious little things to her legs and thighs and breasts and to taste again the business of last night. What a strange boy. At least she could say nobody had ever done *that* to her before. Such a nice boy.

5.

Mangio was not a very smart man but he knew about people. He knew instinctively who would do what and for how much. His world was peopled with whores. Every woman had her price and so did every man. That was why, for the job he had in mind, he thought of Cutter. Cutter handled the winch on the *Jezebel* and from the first time Mangio had seen him he had known that he would do anything for money.

There was not much time. Flake, walking swiftly, would be at the boat in half an hour. Mangio stood up and smoothed out his shirt. The shirt was torn at the seams. That was Flake's work. Hatred welled up as bitter as bile in Mangio's mouth.

He left the office and clashed the gears in the new light gray Buick and beat the light and went down Duval Street at forty miles an hour. He passed Flake and turned his head away and Flake did not see him. He went by the big place at the end of the street where they have the life-size colored posters of the strippers and it was the only time he ever went by that place without slowing

down to look at the pictures. He turned in between the two big orange-colored fuel tanks and ground to a stop on the loose gravel.

The *Jezebel* was outboard of two other shrimpers. Mangio crossed the cluttered decks and high gunwales, regretting the smear of grease on the cream-colored gabardine pants but going on regardless. Cutter was busy on the winch with an oversize wrench. Cruze, the rummy, was sprawled on the fantail. His eyes were closed. He looked sick and pale in the sun. The third man, the negro Bush, was not in sight.

Cutter was a medium sized wiry man with light hair and cold flat eyes. He was wearing grease-blackened dungarees held up on his narrow hips by a wide leather belt, and shapeless shoes with no laces. Even in the open air there was a sour unwashed smell about him. He wore no shirt and his hairless chest and arms were covered with obscene tattoos.

"I want to speak to you," Mangio said. "Come ashore."

There was no curiosity in Cutter's eyes. He put down his wrench and followed Mangio across to the pier.

"Get in the car," Mangio said. "I'll bring you back."

They drove away from Duval Street and into an alley and Mangio stopped the car facing a brick wall. Even with the windows open Cutter's smell made him sick. A pig, he thought. An animal. Why can't he take a bath? Then he remembered that a man who bathed more often might not be interested in the proposition he was about to offer.

"Listen, Cutter. Is five hundred bucks a lot of money to you?"

Cutter rubbed his chin. "Yeah."

"What would you do for five hundred bucks?"

"I don't know."

"What do you think of Flake?"

Cutter shrugged. "He knows his business."

"You had a fight with him one time, didn't you?"

"Yeah."

"He beat you."

"He's a hard man."

Mangio took a deep breath and then came out with it. "I would like it if he did not come back from this trip."

Cutter didn't answer. He took a crumpled pack of cigarettes out of his pocket and lit one without offering it to Mangio and blew a cloud of smoke out of the window.

Mangio was aware of the sweat running down his neck. He mopped his brow with his handkerchief. There was a lump of nausea in his stomach. He wondered if it was his indigestion again or just sitting next to Cutter. In the end Cutter might be worse than Flake. He was beginning to regret the whole thing. But it was too late to stop now. And anyway he could still feel Flake's hands on him and the thirst for revenge came boiling up in him again.

Still Cutter said nothing.

"Do you understand me?" Mangio finally blurted out.

Cutter nodded.

Mangio was beginning to gain a little assurance. "It's easy for a man to be lost overboard when you're *fishing at night.*"

Cutter looked as though he had not heard a word.

"How about it?"

"Not for five hundred."

"How much?"

"A thousand."

It's cheap, Mangio thought. Five hundred for revenge and five more that I will save out of Flake's extra share. A bargain. And suppose he had said five thousand? It would still be worth it. I want the gulls picking at his eyes and the fish eating his flesh.

"Only one thing," Mangio said. "Can you bring the boat in without him?"

"Easy. All I got to do is steer due east. I'm bound to pick up the lights."

"All right."

"I want the dough now."

"Half now. The other half when you come in."

Cutter nodded.

Mangio took out his wallet and pulled out five hundred dollars in hundred dollar bills and put it on the seat. He did not want to touch Cutter's hand. He was looking the other way when Cutter picked up the money.

Mangio dropped Cutter at the entrance to the docks and drove away fast. He felt good now. He felt excited. Maybe he would go by Mom's place. Was it too early? It was never too early for that. But first he would stop for a bicarbonate.

6.

Chambers, sweating out his anguish on board the yacht, waited for his lady love until noon and then, when his racking impatience had torn him to bits, determined to go to look for her. He had no idea of where he would look but he knew that any activity was better than sitting alone with his grief.

He climbed down into the dink and pulled for shore. The wind and tide were against him but he made good progress, putting his shoulders and trunk into it and making a smooth easy motion of it that shot the light boat over the surface.

And for a little while, if he closed his eyes, he could imagine that he was back in the Princeton shell and that the sweat running down his back was a boy's sweat and that around him were his good friends and that all you had to do in life was to pull and pull until you thought your heart might burst except that you knew it would not. And the way it was then you had the confidence of youth and strength and you had never been defeated in anything because there had never been a real test made of you, and so you did not live under any bloody cloud of frustration and fear.

All right now, he told himself. Stop it. It's daylight and you got

through the night and somehow, if she's not back, you'll get through tonight also and all the ones after that. You won't kill yourself and someday, please God, it will be over. Someday the fever will stop and the sickness will have gone and you'll wake up and look at her and know her for the rotten treacherous bitch she is and she'll put her hand on you and nothing will happen and she'll put her lips on you and you'll turn away.

But until then you're helpless and you've got to live through it and go on walking and talking and eating and drinking like anyone else. And you can stand it or most of it except that time when you wake up in the night. That's the time when you're really alone and in the middle of a polar waste and the ice is cracking under you. Somebody, I guess it was Fitzgerald, another Princeton boy the poor bastard, wrote: "In the real dark night of the soul it is always three o'clock in the morning." He was tied up with one too and she must have given it to him right in the same place I'm getting it now. I remember reading about it. There was that time on the Riviera with that French aviator and God knows how many after that. And it busted him up altogether so that he was lost forever in darkness and died without ever really coming out of it.

He brought the dink in neatly in back of the icehouse, careful not to let it rub against the tar-blackened pilings, and pulled himself up onto the pier. A girl was sitting there with her feet dangling over the edge and she said to Chambers, "Have you got a match?"

"Certainly."

He flicked his lighter and extended the flame and she bent her head and put her hand on his and sucked in the smoke. She was blonde, except not really blonde because as she bent over his hand he could see the darker roots in the parted hair. She was young and wore a powder blue skirt and ridiculously high heels and even here in the daylight you got the odor of whatever she had been drinking.

"Thanks," she said.

"Not at all."

"Some tub," she said looking out toward the *Irydia.* "Yours?"

"Yes."

"Tough."

He managed a small smile. He was glad she had asked him for a light. It was good to talk to a stranger.

"Cigarette?" she asked extending the pack.

"Thank you."

"What's it like on a boat like that?"

"What is what like?"

"Just living. Just waking up in the morning and eating and sleeping and all of that. Tell me about it."

"Would you like to see her?" Chambers asked. He said it on impulse, without giving it any thought.

She gave him a long look and there was a peculiar expression of

contempt on the young — not so young — face.

"It's all right," he said. "I won't give you any trouble. You don't have to worry."

"I wasn't worried."

"Then shall we go?"

"Why not?"

He got back into the dink and helped her down and rowed out toward the yacht. She sat in the stern with her feet tucked up under her and the blue skirt drawn tight over her knees. She wore too much powder and her lipstick was not on straight and her hands were blue-veined and cold looking.

"What's your name?" Chambers asked.

"Molly."

"Molly what?"

"Smith."

"That's a good name."

"Isn't it? And you?"

"Allan. Allan Smith."

She grinned and said nothing more. He helped her on board and again the high heels nearly tripped her. With a quick, charming gesture she reached down and pulled off the shoes and went barefoot along the deck.

"It's enormous," she said.

"Comfortable."

"A sea-going hotel. From out there she didn't look nearly this big."

He was amused by the expression on her face when he showed her Irydia's cabin She stroked the silk coverlet and opened the pink cosmetic jars and sniffed happily. When she had had enough he took her back on deck and seated her in one of the varnished wicker chairs and mixed a drink.

"Where are you from, Molly?"

"I don't know. Here and there. Everywhere."

"Where are you going?"

"Just drifting."

"How did you wind up here?"

"This is the end of the line. This is where all the drifters come. You can't go any further."

She might have been a whore but he did not think so. She did not have the toughness of a whore. Maybe she was close to it or on the way but she had not got there yet. Anyway he didn't much care. He had no interest in her that way. All he knew was that he was pathetically glad to have someone to talk to and that there was a sort of I don't care quality about her that gave him some relief from his torment.

"Would you like to take a trip?" he asked.

"All right."

"You haven't asked where."

"What's the difference?"

"You really don't care?"

"I really don't care."

"How soon can you be ready?"

"I'm ready now."

"No baggage?"

"Nope."

"You're a remarkable girl, Molly."

"Oh sure."

"We'll leave this afternoon. I'm just waiting for someone."

"I thought you might be."

"And by the way, my name isn't Smith."

"Neither is mine."

He fed her lunch and then put her down below and she fell asleep. He had it all figured out.

"Darling," Irydia would say. "There's a girl asleep in my cabin."

"Is there?" he would answer.

"Who is she?"

"Her name is Molly," he would say, turning away, feeling very pleased with himself.

But in the end he weakened and was unable to go through with it. The thought of Irydia's displeasure frightened him. He woke Molly up and told her it was all off and took her back to the shore.

"I'm terribly sorry," he said.

"That's all right. It doesn't really matter."

"You understand, don't you?"

"Sure I do. But you know something?"

"What?"

"You should have gone through with it anyway."

She went off down the pier and he rowed back to the yacht and thought that she was absolutely right and that he had not even had the guts to do this one small thing and that having failed at it he was now really sunk.

7.

The *Jezebel* went out the northwest channel past the fortifications and the sunken barge and when they rounded the sea buoy Flake set her due west. There were half a dozen other shrimpers going out also and a big new destroyer looking as tall as a block of apartment houses in the clear air. The destroyer went by fast, throwing her wake all over the channel, and Flake cursed it steadily while he fought the wheel.

Rising out of the sea ahead was an abandoned concrete lighthouse set up on stilts. Every time Flake saw it he remembered the flak towers in the English channel and the Focke-Wulfs coming in hard and the towers keeping them up so that it was tough for them to strafe the Estuary and the ships huddled waiting and the thin nervous scream of the bombs. And every time he thought of it he felt the familiar fist in his stomach and wondered if he would go on feeling it all the rest of his life or if someday it would go away as everything else had gone away.

Toward sundown they were over the shrimp beds and had the nets rigged and the night lights ready, and as soon as it got dark they would begin to drag the nets in thirty fathoms. In the last red flutter of day he saw a pinpoint of light many miles off far behind the Marquesas and put the glasses on it and saw that it was some kind of yacht and wondered briefly where they were bound and then forgot about it.

Cruze came up to him, looking sick and unhappy, and said, "Let me have one, Skipper."

"No."

"I got to have one. I don't feel so good."

"Later."

"I need it bad. I need it right now."

"Get out of here."

The rummy stared at him and shook his head and went shambling off. Flake felt sorry for him but not sorry enough to give him the bottle. What the hell. Key West was full of rummies and none of them would live very long and if you got to feeling sorry for them they would take advantage of you every time.

"All right," Flake said to Cutter. "Let her go."

Cutter gave him a dirty look and muttered something under his breath. Now what the hell's the matter with him? Flake wondered. I got a rummy and a nigger and a temperamental sonofabitch. Some crew. The nigger's the only one that's worth a damn. Cutter's getting too big for his britches. I'll have to cut him down again. And Mangio. That stinking Mangio. He was too quiet when I left. He should have been down at the pier. What's he cooking? You know damn well he's cooking something.

The weighted nets sank slowly down into the dark water. The ship lay motionless. The sun had hesitated for a moment over the horizon and then had plunged out of sight. The darkness reached out for them. Flake switched on his running lights.

The net was heavy now. He kept his hand on the cable and he could feel it pull.

"Take her up," he told Cutter.

"What makes you think she's ready?"

"Goddamn you, one more crack out of you and I'll beat your ears off and feed the rest to the sharks. When I tell you to move you better hop to it."

The winch groaned as the cable began to rise. The ship heeled to starboard under the weight.

"Put some oil on those winch bearings," Flake said to Cruze.

The rummy started forward with the oil can. He walked stiffly, as though his joints hurt. Suddenly Flake let go of the wheel and darted through the doorway and jerked Cruze away from the winch.

"Watch your hands, man. What the hell's the matter with you? That thing will chew you up like hamburger."

The rummy began to shake. Tears formed in his eyes and ran down his furrowed cheeks. "Give me one, Flake."

"All right. One."

"One's all I need. Honest. Let me have one and I'll be a good man. You know I'm a good man. If I wasn't you wouldn't of taken me."

"Shut up," Flake said.

He went back and got the bottle of whiskey and handed it to Cruze. When the rummy had had a good long pull out of it Flake forced his hands loose and took the bottle away from him.

Cruze grinned and wiped the back of his hand across his mouth. "You're a good man, Flake."

"Get back to work."

The first haul was a good one. The nets came up slow, alive and heavy with the weight of what was in them. The shrimp were thicker than a man's finger and pearly and glistening on the ice. Later, when they returned to Key West, the shrimp would be pulled out ice and all in the swinging bucket attached to the steam winch and there would be maybe fifty or sixty boxes of them and at fifty-four dollars a box that would be a lot of shrimp and a lot of money.

They dragged again and while the nets were down Flake went back to the wheelhouse. There was a cold stillness in the air that he did not like. The air was too quiet and there was a touch of north in it. It was always still at sundown and right after but there was something funny about it tonight.

He tapped the barometer and was surprised to see that the needle had dropped sharply. He turned on the receiving set but was unable to get a clear signal; the air was loaded with static. That means a northwester coming, he thought. What a lousy break. Here we are really hauling them in and we get a lousy northwester. Now it will blow for maybe three or four days and fishing will be out of the question and we'll be stuck with half a load and our ice going and what the hell. Damn.

He stepped out on deck and said, "Speed it up. There's a blow coming."

Cutter didn't answer.

"You hear me?" Flake demanded.

"Yeah."

"Then answer me, damn you."

"Okay."

Flake returned to the wheelhouse and flicked on the radio phone and let it warm up for a few minutes and then called the marine operator in Key West and asked for a weather report.

"Marine operator to *Jezebel*. A cold front is moving across the Gulf and will strike us sometime tonight. Winds will veer to the northwest and increase in velocity."

"What velocity?"

"Gust of twenty to thirty miles an hour."

"Great."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Nothing. Thank you."

Twenty to thirty. That meant forty to fifty down here. It always blew harder down here. There would be nothing for it but to run in behind the Tortugas and no one knew how long that would be for nor how much of their haul would go bad.

Around ten o'clock they were dragging for the second time and Flake was trying to get a later report when Bush put his head through the doorway and said, "You better do something about them two."

"What about them?"

"Old Cutter is about to kill that other fella."

Flake went out fast, thinking: This is definitely not my night. Some other night maybe but not this one. This night I should be in a room in the La Concha hotel in a big bed with the curtains open and the moon coming in and a bottle of whiskey and a soft, loving girl and to hell with shrimp and northwesters and Mangio and all of it.

Cruze was curled up on the deck holding his arms over his head to protect his face and Cutter was kicking him hard in the ribs. Flake took Cutter by the collar and spun him around and hit him solidly in the throat. His fist made a meaty sound and Cutter fell to his knees, his mouth working, groping for air.

Flake picked Cruze up and propped him against the winch and went back for the bottle. He poured whiskey down the rummy's throat and waited until the sick bewildered eyes opened and stared at him blankly. Cutter was still on his hands and knees shaking his head like a dog with the heaves, trying to suck the wind into his clogged throat. Flake capsized a bucket over the side and pulled it up dripping and spewed the water over Cutter's head.

Cutter glared up at him and Flake said, "Get up, you pig."

"Why you hit me?" Cutter managed to grate out.

"You're some boy. Beating up on a rummy. Some boy."

"I'll fix you."

"Sure you will. But not when I'm looking at you."

Flake took the rummy into the wheelhouse and stretched him out on one of the bunks. Cruze's long limbs rattled and shook like palmetto fronds in the wind.

"Sorry, Flake. Sorry I made trouble for you."

"Forget it. He's been asking for it all day anyway. What was it about?"

"I guess I got in his way. You told me to keep that bearing oiled and I guess I was in his way. He cussed me and then he hit me."

"You want another shot?"

Cruze shook his head. "Not now."

"Good man."

But the real trouble came an hour before dawn. It was blowing hard by that time; the ship was climbing into steep crests and there was black water spilling over her bow. Sheets of rain boiled out of the west and spattered the wheelhouse windows. Flake got into his foul-weather gear, boots and yellow oilskins. As he was buttoning the jacket he heard the winch scream and knew what it meant; the cable had fouled somewhere and was stripping the gears.

"Turn it off," he bellowed into the blackness and heard the shrill sound die away and with it the pounding of the donkey engine.

He got out his big four-cell flashlight and went forward along the slime-wet deck. Cutter was up on the bow peering over the side.

"Anchor cable slipped loose," Cutter said. "Net's fouled in it."

"What do you mean slipped? How the hell could she slip?"

"Look for yourself."

"Where's Bush?"

"Down below. On the engine."

"Here," he said to Cutter. "Hold the light."

He went over the gunwale and held himself with one hand while he groped with the other along the cable. She had slipped all right. Some mess. Maybe they would lose the whole rig. How the hell could she slip? In all his time at sea he had never heard of an anchor rope slipping. It was goddamn funny. Had that sonofabitch Cutter . . . ? He raised his head to look at Cutter and as he did so Cutter clubbed him hard on the side of the skull with the flashlight.

He saw the light coming at him looking as big as an aircraft beacon and then there was a brighter light that exploded inside his head and then there was no light at all. He did not know that he had fallen away from the boat or that the oilskins were dragging him down or that Cutter had left the bow and gone back to the wheelhouse. He did not know that his slowly sinking body was alone in the dark sea and that the *Jezebel* was thrusting away from him at full speed.

The first he knew of anything was that he was dreaming and in his dream they were back on that run to Murmansk and they had gotten it for fair this time right in the engine room and she was going down fast and he was fighting the suction and trying to keep the oil out of his lungs and the cold was scissoring him up the middle and the destroyers were dropping their bloody charges and if they got any closer they would blow out his guts and leave him floating like a dynamited fish.

Then he was fighting his way up and kicking off the boots and trying to get out of the jacket and knowing now that it was not a dream but that he was really in the water and his head hurt and something had happened to him but he could not remember what.

8.

Cutter severed the cables with half a dozen blows of the fire axe and then ran back to the wheelhouse and put the throttle full ahead. He swung the boat in a wide circle, wallowing in the trough, thinking he might sight Flake's body and that if he did he would run it down. But in the black water and against the spray and rain he could see nothing and anyway there was no reason to suppose that Flake had not gone directly to the bottom. He put the wheel over and began to run to the westward, quartering the seas.

Bush came up from the engine room, a rag tied around his neck and the sweat running down his arms and looked surprised to see Cutter at the wheel.

"Where's the captain?" Bush asked.

"Gone."

"What do you mean gone?"

"Washed over."

Bush stared at him. "How could that be?"

"We fouled the net and he went over the side to break her loose and a big one caught him and he was gone. I've been running in circles for an hour looking for him but you can't see a damn thing in this weather. He's gone."

"It don't sound like Flake. It sounds mighty strange."

Cutter turned his head and looked directly at him. Bush lowered his eyes.

"I got to make a report," Cutter said. "You better get back on that engine."

Bush went back through the hatch to the engine room. Cutter lashed the wheel and moved aft to Flake's bunk. On the way he passed Cruze. He stood for a long moment staring down at the rummy but there was no sign that Cruze was awake or had been awake at any time.

Cutter reached under Flake's mattress and took out a short nosed .38 calibre Smith & Wesson wrapped in a green plastic bag, and a small metal box. He smashed the lock on the box with the butt of the revolver and then put the gun inside his shirt and opened the box. There was more there than he had figured on, most of it in hundred dollar bills. He did not bother to count it. He stuffed the bills into his pocket and went back to the wheelhouse and called the operator in Key West and told her that the captain of the *Jezebel* had been washed overboard in heavy weather and that because of the storm he was taking the boat into the Tortugas. The operator acknowledged his signal and he flicked off the set and brought the boat back onto course.

9.

Flake had gotten rid of his oilskins and was swimming easily, not trying to get anywhere, just staying afloat. The big seas heaved him up and dropped him down and when he rose again he saw that a gray watery dawn was chewing away at the blackness.

He knew that he would drown after a while but still he kept swimming. His head hurt and he put his hand up to it and brought it away bloody and thought how much easier it would be to quit and let it go at that. But there was a stubborn core in him that kept his arms and legs moving slowly in spite of anything his brain might have decided.

He had been in the water before and he knew that if a man nursed his strength he could stay afloat for a surprisingly long time. He knew also that in the end it would not make any difference but still he wanted to stretch it out as long as possible. He was not terribly afraid of dying but he wanted very much to live. He wanted more than anything else to get his hands on Cutter. That need alone would sustain him. And he

wanted his own boat. He did not want to work any more for Mangio or anyone else. With this last check that he had cashed and with his cut from this trip and with what was already in the box he could have done it. He had been working toward it for a long time and now he was ready and that was when they had taken it away from him. It was like one of those crooked crap games where you're going good and you let everything ride and it looks like you've got it made and then on the last pass they switch the dice on you and it's all over.

Where was the sense in it? Where was the sense in the war and the fighting and the women and the money if it was to end this way? One lousy boner and they had finished him. He should have known better than to turn his back on Cutter but he had forgotten and now he was through.

He rose again on a crest and this time there was something white a long way off, looking as far off as the moon but definitely there. And at first he could not believe it because it was an incredible piece of luck and then when he did believe it he thought what a lousy trick it was to show him a ship now when it was too far off or too late or maybe going the wrong way with him struggling to reach it and not being able to and dying struggling.

But even while he was thinking about it he had started toward it and it seemed bigger and he was able to judge its course. And he was remembering the glimmer of white he had seen the night before and wondered if this was the same one and decided it could be no other.

He knew that they would not see him in these big seas unless they were right on top of him and so he swam straight out toward them not saving anything any more, using it all up, knowing that if they missed him the rest did not matter.

And when he was very close he was absolutely finished and did not remember much of anything after that except that she was some kind of big white motor sailer and there were hands on him and then darkness and then nothing.

10.

It was close to noon before Chambers picked up Loggerhead Key. He had been moving slowly because of the heavy weather, trying to ease his ship as much as possible. The man they had fished out of the water was wrapped in blankets and asleep down below. Irydia had been there with him most of the morning. She was very good about that sort of thing. She had immediately taken charge of the half-drowned man and had undressed him and bandaged his head and put him to bed. Now she was sitting beside him, waiting for him to wake up, wanting to reassure him when he opened his eyes. Isn't she marvelous? Chambers thought. Why did she

have to turn out such a bitch? Why did all that warmth and tenderness have to turn into some kind of crazy nymphomania that could only end in destruction?

He could see the fort now and studied it carefully through the glasses. It was a bad day for a landfall. The water would be milky and he would not be able to see any variation in depth and he would have to be right on top of the markers before he picked them up. He slowed his speed and studied his chart again and this time when he looked up he saw that there was a boat ahead of him. It was a shrimper going down the channel and all he had to do was to follow it. Except that as he watched it he saw that it was not going anywhere; it was fast on the reef and pounding hard and beginning to break up. At least I know where not to go, Chambers thought.

Irydia came through the open hatch and with her was the man they had taken out of the water. He was a short dark man with heavy arms and tremendous hands. He had close cropped hair and a dark intent face. He might have been thirty-five or forty and would probably look younger when rested.

Chambers glanced at Irydia and she shrugged and said, "I couldn't keep him down there. He insisted on getting up."

"She told me you were heading for the Tortugas," the dark man said. "Maybe I can help."

"Have you been in here before?"

"Sure," Flake said. "There's nothing to it in good weather but in a blow like this it's tricky because sometimes a northwester will shift the bar. But if you hold her as she goes you'll be about right."

"I think one of the markers is gone. According to the chart there should be a nun out there but I don't find it."

"Let me see your glasses."

Chambers handed him the Seiss 7 x 50's and Flake studied the entrance carefully. Suddenly his face changed and Chambers knew what he was looking at — the ship on the reef.

"How long has the wreck been there?" Chambers asked.

"Not long. Maybe a couple of hours."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Because she's my ship."

"What about the marker?"

"It's gone, but I can take you in without it."

With Chambers at the wheel and Flake up on the bow piloting, they made the entrance and came abeam of the wreck.

"I got to go aboard her," Flake said.

"How do you expect to do that?"

"Swim."

"Are you crazy? You came within a minute of drowning last night. Do you want to finish the job?"

"I'll make it. If you want to wait for me I'll be back in ten minutes. If you don't wait I'll go anyway."

"He seems a very determined man," Irydia said.

"What about it?"

"You don't leave me much choice," Chambers said.

"You're in good water here. You've got a hundred feet on either side. Just hold her into the wind and I'll make it as fast as I can."

Chambers shrugged. "I guess you know what you're doing but even if you don't I can't stop you. Suit yourself."

Flake mounted the rail and went over the side without hesitation. He was under water a long time and then they saw the dark cropped head looking like a seal's head moving steadily. He was swimming breast stroke, not wasting his strength.

"Quite a man," Irydia said.

Chambers looked at her. Is it starting already? he wondered. "Yes," he said.

They saw Flake seize a line trailing over the stern and go up it hand over hand. Then he was gone into the wrecked ship. Five minutes later he let himself down and started back toward them. Chambers had put down a swimming ladder for him and Flake grabbed it and pulled himself up. His back muscles stood out in sharp relief under the wet shirt and his face showed ridges of strain. His eyes were red rimmed from salt. Irydia handed him a towel and one of Chambers' dry shirts.

"Did you find what you wanted?" Chambers asked him.

"No, but I know where to look."

"What do we do now?"

"This is Hospital Key. That's Bush Key dead ahead and then Garden Key where the fort is. There are markers between Bush and Garden and that's where the channel lies. Keep her as she goes."

The wind was on their quarter now, pushing them toward the massive domination of the fort. The fort occupied almost the entire key. It was a huge six-sided affair with a tower in the middle. Sheets of spray were beating up against the great brick walls. Another line squall sent hard driving rain slashing at the yacht.

"When you get in the lee you'll find a pier," Flake said. "You can pull right up to it. There's plenty of water."

Chambers was dividing his attention between the channel and the big following seas that came boiling up astern, letting the yacht fall off every now and then to avoid the danger of being pooped. Flake watched him with approval. He was not sure yet what kind of a man Chambers was but if nothing else he was a seaman.

II.

When the *Jezebel* had struck Cutter had known at once that she was through. The coral had taken the bottom out of her. You could tell by the way she settled into it, the kind of easy relaxed way she gave herself to the coral, that it was all

over. By the time Bush came bounding up from the engine room Cutter was already sliding the raft over the side.

"What did we hit?" Bush demanded.

"The bloody reef."

"Man, man. Couldn't you see the channel?"

"Save the talk. Give me a hand with this raft."

"You leaving her?"

"Damn right I'm leaving. She'll break up fast in these seas."

"What about Cruze?"

"The hell with him."

"You can't leave him here."

"What's the difference to a lousy rummy? He's better off dead."

"You got to take him."

It was not so much the way Bush said it as the realization that with two men missing he would have to answer too many questions that decided Cutter. "All right. Get him out here."

Bush helped Cruze out on deck. The rummy staggered on rubber legs.

"What happened?"

"She's on the rocks. We got to get off her."

"Where's Flake?"

"Overboard."

Cruze started to protest but Bush took him firmly by the shoulder and said, "Come on now."

"Listen," Cruze said shaking his head. "I don't understand it. What's going on?"

"Never mind. You come along."

"But where's Flake?"

"Never you mind."

Bush got an oilskin jacket out of the wheelhouse and put it over Cruze's shoulders and buttoned it around him. The rummy had a breath on him that was enough to knock down a mule. Bush was not a drinker himself and the stale smell of the whiskey sickened him. He felt sorry for Cruze and at the same time a little angry with him.

"You come on now," he said.

Cruze allowed himself to be led to the rail and pushed down into the raft. Cutter was there already, cursing at them to hurry. Bush saw that Cruze was stowed where he would not fall out and then pushed them away from the side of the boat. There were two paddles in the raft. Bush took one and Cutter the other and they set out for the fort.

The seas took them and beat them back. The white flecked crests spattered over them. Cruze was shivering, his jaws rattling like those of a spring-wound doll. Then they were in the lee and out of the worst of it and making it to the beach. They grounded in the shallows and Bush took the rummy by the shoulders and dragged him up onto the shore.

"Is there anybody on this island?" Bush asked Cutter.

"No."

"Then what do we do for food and water?"

"I don't know," Cutter said.

"If you wasn't in such a hurry to get off the boat we could of took something with us. And if you wasn't in such a hurry to get away from where Flake went over we might of found him."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You're a smart man, you figure it out."

Cutter stood up. Bush watched him carefully. Cutter reached inside his shirt and took out the plastic bag with the revolver. Bush's face changed, It did not reflect fear but intense caution.

"For a lousy nigger you talk too goddamn much," Cutter said.

"Yes, sir," Bush said.

"I don't want no more talk."

"Yes, sir."

"Don't forget it."

"I'll remember."

I got to get rid of him, Cutter was thinking. He talks too much. He smells something about Flake. If he puts his mind to it he'll begin to talk about it. I can get rid of him and say he was lost trying to swim ashore. The way it's blowing it will be a couple of days yet before the Coast Guard comes after us and that will give me time to figure it all out.

Bush was looking over Cutter's shoulder. Suddenly his face brightened. "There's a ship coming," he said.

Cutter looked up and saw a large white yacht working its way to the pier. There was a man, a heavy-backed dark-headed man, up on the bow. Even at a distance of five hundred yards it was unmistakeably Flake. For a moment Cutter felt as he had when Flake had hit him in the throat; he could not breathe. Then, without a word, he turned and ran toward the walls.

12.

After they had come ashore and Flake had seen his crew Irydia asked him to show her the fort.

"There's not much to see," he answered. "Nothing but ruins."

"But that's the wonderful part. I think it's marvelous. Fantastic. Come and walk with me."

"What about your husband?"

"What about him?"

"He might not like it."

"Surely there's nothing wrong in our taking a little walk together."

"If I was your husband I'd think it was plenty wrong."

"Well, I'll tell you a little secret. He's not my husband."

"Whatever he is, he's still the guy who pulled me out of the water."

"Really now. You're making a tremendous production out of nothing. All I wanted to do was to take a walk."

"Where I come from a girl doesn't go walking with a man unless she's got a pretty good reason."

"Where *do* you come from?"

"Key West."

"Such a strange town."

"Maybe so. I don't pay much attention to it."

"What *do* you pay attention to?"

"Shrimp."

"Oh my, she thought. This one is a dilly. You've known all kinds but this is a real strange one. Awfully attractive though. Sort of brooding and difficult and terribly tough looking but probably very nice underneath. Look how sweet he was with that ghastly drunk on the beach. And the negro. He was terribly nice to that negro.

"Why are you so nervous, you poor little man?" she said. "You look as though you expected to meet someone."

"I do."

"Here?"

"That's right."

"But I thought the place was abandoned."

"It is."

"Oh, stop being so difficult. I don't know what you're talking about at all. And I don't think you do either."

"There's a man in there somewhere. His name is Cutter. I'm looking for him and I guess maybe he's looking for me."

"Then why don't you find him?"

"Maybe I will."

"What's it all about?"

"Attempted murder."

"You're joking."

"Do I look like the kind of man who makes jokes?"

"No," she said. "I can't say that you do. Is that why you were in the water?"

"That's right."

She put out her hand and touched his forearm lightly with her fingertips. "I don't think I like Mr. Cutter."

"That makes two of us."

"I'd better change that dressing for you. Or are you planning another swimming party?"

Flake shrugged. "It feels okay."

"Well, it won't if it becomes infected. And I imagine you'll want to be in reasonably good shape when you meet up with this friend of yours."

Cruze and Bush were fishing off the end of the pier. Cruze had his eyes closed and was dozing. Bush was working at the fishing and beside him was a pile of pink and yellow grunts.

"You see any sign of him?" Bush asked Flake.

"No."

"He's in there all right."

"Sure he is. There's no other place he could go."

"Don't forget he's got that gun with him."

"I'm not forgetting."

"What a shame Allan doesn't have a rifle or something on board," Irydia said.

"Isn't it?"

"He never thought he'd have any use for a gun. Anyway, he hates them."

"Sure."

"What do you mean by that?"

"He's the kind who would hate guns."

"And you like them?"

"I don't feel either way about them. Only that they're necessary."

"Why couldn't we just sail out of here and leave Cutter on the island?"

"Because right now it's blowing about forty miles an hour out there. You don't feel it here in the lee of the fort but as soon as you got out of the channel it would knock you flat."

"If we called the Coast Guard wouldn't they come to pick him up?"

"I want to take him myself."

"But he has a gun."

"I'll take him."

"Are you really so tough or just stupid?"

"Both."

The long watch of the night before had exhausted Chambers and he had been asleep in his cabin for most of the day. Now, in the late afternoon, he awakened to find Irydia and Flake sitting on the fantail with a bottle of whiskey and a bucket of ice between them.

"Hello, darling," she said. "Mr. Flake was bashful about staying for a drink but I insisted."

"Of course. Perfectly welcome."

"And then too I wanted to change the dressing. Doesn't he look beautiful with a turban around his head?"

"I don't know if that's exactly the word."

"Of course it is. All sort of glowering and dark and beautiful. Do you always scowl that way, Mr. Flake, or do you do it just because you know it's so lovely?"

What a bitch, Flake thought. If she was mine I'd boot her into the street so fast. Why does he take it? She's a hot looking piece all right but there are plenty of others just as hot or hotter. She's got the knife in him and she's twisting it. Poor bastard. I better stay clear. After all he did pick me out of the drink. I guess I owe him that. But nothing more. Let each man defend his own. I'll keep away but if she chases after me it's up to him to do something about it. If he doesn't want to do anything about it then to hell with him. To hell with both of them.

Flake stood up. "I better go and see how my crew is making out."

"But you'll be back for dinner, won't you?" Irydia said.

"No. Bush has got him a mess of grunt. We'll eat on the beach."

"That might be better," Chambers said.

"Sure," Flake agreed. "Better all around."

After he had gone Chambers turned to her and said, "You can't wait, can you?"

"For what, darling?"

"You know for what."

"You're not going to start that again, are you, sweetheart?"

"I'm not starting anything. I'm trying to finish something."

She gave him a loving smile. "You will, sweetie. But in the meantime we're here to have some fun so let's relax and be gay."

"It's all so simple for you."

"Not really. But what good does it do to stew about things?"

"I would like just once to understand what goes on in that head of yours."

"So would I," Irydia said.

13.

Towards sundown the wind increased. And with it came the sharp rainsqualls. Flake and his crew huddled behind the dripping walls. They kept a fire going but the rain-wet wood gave off more smoke than heat. The peculiar tropic cold that is somehow colder than northern cold bit at them out of the bricks.

Flake stood up and walked down to the beach and began to collect another load of driftwood. In the last glimmer of day he could see the *Jezebel* on the reef. From where he stood she looked almost intact but he knew that she was completely destroyed underneath and that in another few hours the pounding would shake her apart and there would be nothing left of her but bits of wood on the beach.

It made him sad. It was true that she was not his boat and he certainly didn't give a damn what happened to Mangio's property but, still, he had been her skipper and no skipper likes to lose his ship. He knew her quirks and vagaries and virtues. In a way, he reflected, it's like a marriage between a captain and his ship. A ship develops personality — some are sweet and gentle, others tricky and uncertain — and a man learns to accept that personality and to live with it and to believe that he alone of all men is qualified to cope with it. When he turns over his ship to another captain it's a little like watching a woman he has loved go off with another man. The destruction of the ship then was something more to add to the score against Cutter.

His head was a brute now, pounding like a drum. He thought of going to the yacht and asking for aspirin but decided against it. He did not want to become involved. He hated trios. A relationship between a man and a woman should be a simple proposition but this business between Chambers and Irydia was unhealthy. He did not want any part of it. She was a whore and he felt nothing but contempt for whores. Whores had a hard masculine quality that repelled him, and whether they were peddling their wares along Duval Street or on board a fancy yacht they were all the same.

He gathered his wood and walked back to the fort and found that in his absence Bush had been down to the yacht and had borrowed a tarpaulin with which to protect Cruze from the cold. Flake felt guilty about Cruze. The rummy was obviously ill. A series of chills racked his skinny body. His face was flushed and dry looking.

"How are you doing?" Flake asked him.

"Okay."

"Feel bad?"

"No, sir."

"I should of left you in Key West. I never should of dragged you out on this trip."

Cruze grinned. "What's the difference? Nobody lives forever."

"Now what do you want to go and talk that way for?" Bush said.

"Did he eat anything?" Flake asked.

"Nope."

"Rummies don't eat much anyway."

"How about giving me a shot, Flake?" Cruze called. "One for the road."

"If I had it I'd give it to you."

"They've got it down there on that fancy boat, haven't they?"

"Yeah, I guess they have."

He hated the thought of going down to the yacht to ask for anything. Because of the woman there was a wall between himself and Chambers and he did not want to have to climb over it. But he owed it to Cruze.

"Wrap him up," he told Bush.

"What do you aim to do with him?"

"He's sick. I'm taking him down there. They'll find a place for him."

Bush nodded his approval and wrapped the canvas around Cruze. Flake bent down and picked the rummy up and cradled him on his arms. He was astonishingly light. I bet he doesn't weigh over ninety pounds, Flake thought. What keeps him alive? It must be the whiskey. There's probably a lot of nourishment in whiskey only in the end the alcohol burns you up to nothing.

"Where are we going?" Cruze asked.

"To get a drink," Flake told him.

There was no one on deck and the hatchway was closed. I probably picked the wrong damn time, he thought. She's probably earning her board and keep.

He knocked on the hatch cover and a moment later it slid open and Chambers was there wearing gray flannel beltless slacks and a navy blue jersey shirt and holding a glass in his hand.

"I'm sorry to bother you," Flake said.

"Not at all," Chambers answered stiffly.

"I've got a sick man on my hands and this is bad weather for him to be outside. I thought maybe you could find a place for him up forward."

Chambers frowned and examined his drink carefully and then said, "Of course."

"Can I bring him through?"

"There's a hatch up forward. If you don't mind I'd rather have you use that."

He doesn't want me to see her, Flake thought. That's all right. He doesn't have to worry. I don't want any part of her.

He carried Cruze down into the crews' quarters and stowed him in an empty bunk and wrapped a blanket tightly around him. In spite

of himself he stared aft through the galley thinking he might see her, but her stateroom door was closed and she did not come out.

"You said you'd give me a drink," the rummy whispered.

"I'll see what I can do."

He put his head into the main cabin and said, "Maybe you'd do me one more favor."

"Certainly."

"This guy I brought down is in a bad way. He's got the shakes. Maybe you could spare some whiskey for him."

"Of course."

A bloody little gentleman, Flake thought. If he found her in the hay with some joker he'd say 'I beg your pardon' and go quietly away. But I don't know. Maybe it takes more guts that way. I can see what a row he has to hoe.

"Take the bottle if you like," Chambers said.

"No. Just a shot in a glass. That will carry him."

Chambers gave him the glass and Flake thanked him and took the whiskey back to Cruze. The rummy clutched at it and tossed it off in one gulp and burst into a fit of violent coughing.

Flake waited until Cruze had caught his breath and then left him and went up on deck through the forward hatch. As he crossed to the rail he was able to look down through the glass hatch cover into Irydia's brightly lit cabin. She was lying on her bunk wearing tight blue silk pajamas that emphasized her full bosom and outlined her hips. She was not reading, just lying there with her eyes open. He thought she might be able to see him through the glass but her face did not change nor did her eyes move. He stood there for a long moment staring down at her and then realized that because the light was from below she was unable to see him after all. He turned away and jumped over the rail onto the pier.

Bush was nursing the fire. "You get him fixed up?" he asked.

"Yeah."

"It won't be for long. He'll be dead soon."

"How do you know?"

"I can smell it on him. You can smell death a long way off. I smell it stronger on him all the time."

"Maybe he'll be better off."

"Maybe."

"What do you smell on me?"

Bush stirred the fire. His face was serious. "I don't know. Not death. Money."

"That's not a bad smell."

"No, sir."

"What about Cutter? What do you smell on him?"

"He just stinks all the time."

"You can say that again."

"What you fixing to do about him?"

"I'll go and get him."

"When?"

"When I'm ready."

"He'll kill you if he can."

"He's already tried that. Next time I won't give him the chance."

"Maybe he's looking for you right now."

"I don't think so. There's too many witnesses now. If he killed me out here in the open he'd have to kill all the rest of you too, and that would be a big job even for Cutter. No, he's holed up there waiting for me to come at him. I'll let him sweat a while."

"What about you? Don't you sweat?"

"All the time."

Bush yawned. "It's going to be a long cold night."

"We got enough wood to last us."

Bush lay down by the fire and was almost instantly asleep. Flake moved a little further away, into the darkness. He hated to give up the warmth but on the other hand he did not want to be too close to the light. It was always possible that Cutter might get some bright ideas.

Once, above the roar of the wind, he heard angry voices from the yacht. What a pair, he thought. What does he get out of it? No dame is worth all that fuss. Then he was asleep and did not awaken until he heard steps dragging on the sand and the dry whisper of leather on the courtyard paving. He sat up quickly and got his legs under him and crouched there waiting.

A figure came into the firelight and he saw that it was the girl. She had a blanket wrapped around her shoulders and her long black hair was loose down her back and blowing in the wind. She bent over Bush for a moment and then straightened and stood irresolutely by the fire. She looked small and childlike standing there with the blanket around her and her hair loose. Then she was moving toward him and he stood up and she said softly, "Oh, there you are."

"Yes."

"It's terribly cold, isn't it? You have no blanket. I brought you a blanket."

"Thanks."

"How is your head?"

"Fine."

There was a long silence and she shivered a little and hugged the blanket tighter. "Do you want me to go?"

"Suit yourself."

"I wanted to talk to you."

"All right."

"You don't make it any easier, do you?"

"No," he said. "Do you?"

She turned and started away. He stood and watched her. When she had gone beyond the fire she stopped and came back. Her eyes were very large and black in the yellow light. She came up to him and let go of the blanket and kissed him hard.

"Be kind to me," she said.

14.

Chambers was awake when she

left the ship. They had quarreled for two hours and finally she had said, "I can't stand any more of this," and had gone into her cabin and slammed the door. He sat alone for a long time finishing the bottle and thought of going in to her but decided against it and went instead to his own bunk. He was drunk but not as drunk as he wanted to be. He was not drunk enough for his brain to stop functioning or for sleep to ease his unhappiness.

When he heard her door open and the hatch sliding back he raised his arm and looked at the luminous dial on his watch. It was after two. She's only going up on deck to get some air and smoke a cigarette, he told himself, but even while he said it he knew that it was not so and where she was really going and what she was going for. He knew too that if he went after her he could stop her but that once he had done that the whole thing would be out in the open and everything would be finally dead. As long as he did nothing she would return and they could go on a little longer. The big thing, the great thing, was to do nothing.

He got out of his bunk and went up on deck and stood there in the wind looking at the yellow point of light that was Flake's fire. The dirty thing, the rotten thing, he thought was that he did not really hate either one of them. The only absolutely solid hate he had was for himself. And the worst part, the most absolutely contemptible part, was that right now he wanted her more than ever.

15.

Next day the wind blew stronger. The sky was hard and clear, as if it had been carved out of some bright blue metal. The sea had been churned to a milky gray and yellow clots of foam spattered the beach. The birds were down on the water in the lee of the fort, riding it out, facing up into the wind. Chunks of purple jelly trailing poisonous streamers came drifting ashore and died in the sun. Chambers ran spring lines fore and aft and the yacht rode comfortably beneath the sheltering walls.

Irydia stayed in her cabin. Once Chambers tried the door and found it locked. He knocked gently.

"What is it?" she asked without opening the door.

"I want to talk to you."

"Please, sweetie. Let's not have any scenes."

"No scenes. I just want to talk to you."

"Later, darling."

Her voice was husky as though she had been crying. He felt very sorry for her.

16.

Flake paced the beach. He was worried. Not about Chambers and the girl and what had happened last

night; it had been up to Chambers to stop her and he had not. He was worried about himself. He should have settled matters with Cutter by this time. He should have gone right into the fort and taken Cutter immediately. He had said he would let Cutter sweat a while but that was not the real reason. The real reason was that he had not the guts for it. A man with guts doesn't sit around making explanations; he goes ahead and does what he has to do and when he isn't doing it he shuts up about it.

Maybe he had been in the water too long. Something had taken the starch out of him. In a way it was like Chambers and his girl — always on the defensive, always waiting for her to make the move. What he needed was a drink. The old giant killer. His shield and his armor. Some hero.

And what about the girl? He had to do a lot of thinking about that girl and some time he would get around to it but just now he was putting it off like everything else.

"He got to come out for food and water," Bush said.

"Sure he does. But not yet."

"When he comes he'll use that gun."

"You afraid of him?"

Bush thought it over. "Yes, sir. I am."

I haven't even got the guts to admit it, Flake thought. It was the one thing I was always sure of, the one commodity I could always trade on, and now that's gone.

In the afterglow of sundown the wind dropped. The sky was brassy and there was a haze over the water. Then the sun was gone and the wind came pushing up bigger than ever. It howled through the cannon emplacements and across the parade ground. It was blowing a full gale now. And with the wind came the moon, throwing gaunt shadows across the walls.

Flake stood up and went over to Bush and shook him gently and said, "Lend me your knife."

The negro was instantly awake. "What's the matter?"

"I just want your knife."

"Why do you want a knife in the middle of the night?"

"None of your damned business. Give it to me."

Bush pulled the big clasp knife out of his pocket and handed it to him.

"All right," Flake said, moving quickly away into the darkness.

He had removed his shoes, and made no sound crossing the quadrangle or in the passageways. Once something exploded in an angry flutter beside him and he leaped back with the knife open in his hand and saw that it was only a pelican going up black against the moon.

Back in Key West they said this place was haunted. They said the ghosts of the prisoners who had died here still roamed among the

ruins. If so this was a great night for them. Between the moon and the wind a man could see almost anything on a night like this.

It occurred to him that Cutter might not be in the fort at all; he might be down on the tip of the island where he would have clear ground to see across and room in which to shoot. Flake went over the wall and dropped down onto the sand and ran crouching low across the moon-washed space. Out here the wind was even stronger. Particles of sand stung his face and gritted against his teeth.

There was a patch of palmettos and he got into them and crouched there waiting, the breath pounding in his chest, the blade held across his body, waiting, not seeing anything, expecting at any moment the thunder of the gun and not hearing anything but the scrabble of the wind through the bushes.

There was a dank cold lump in his stomach and it kept him crouched there motionless when he should have been moving on. Go ahead, he told himself. You started it and you got to finish it. Keep moving. Keep it simple. What could be simpler than a man with a gun? You're thinking too much. Keep moving. Come on.

He jumped out of the palmettos and forced himself down to the heaped coral tip of the island and saw that there was nothing there and some of the coldness went out of him so that, coming back to the fort, he was able to keep himself from crouching or running.

Working systematically he began to explore one turret after another and it was while he was in the third turret that he heard the steps. At first he was not quite sure but then they came closer and they were steps all right. He froze against the wall and loosened his grip on the knife handle and unclenched his cramped fingers and tightened them again. Then the shadow that was more than a shadow came through the archway and without any further hesitation Flake propelled himself off the wall and had the man's wrist in a hammerlock and the point of the knife digging into his back. Except that even as he did so he knew the wrist was too thin and the back sagged too limply and the smell of whiskey was like a cloud around him.

Cruze giggled. "Fooled you." His voice was slurred.

Flake released him and said, "What the hell are you doing here?"

"Looking for you."

"Are you crazy? I came within an inch of killing you."

"So what?"

"How did you get off the boat?"

"Walked. Me and my old friend Johnny Walker. We carried each other."

"Did you steal Chambers' hooch?"

"Careless man. Left it lying around."

"Get back where you belong."

"Can't. Came to help you."

"I don't need any help."

"Cutter has a gun. Takes two good men to handle guy with gun."

"Clear out, damn you."

Cruze made a sound that could have been laughter but was more like strangulation. "No savvy," he said.

Flake's open palm shot out and took him across the cheek and under the impact of it Cruze's head jerked back and he slid down the wall. Flake took him by the collar and hauled him erect and said, "Do you savvy that, you rum-dumb bastard?"

"Okay, Flake."

"Now get back to the ship."

"I only wanted to help you."

"Get going."

"But listen, Flake . . ."

"Move."

The rummy shambled off, his long legs throwing grotesque shadows across the moonglow. Flake watched him until he was out of sight. He felt lousy about hitting Cruze but what else could he do? And anyway he was furiously angry. The fact that he had come so close to knifing the rummy had left him thoroughly shaken.

He went through the archway to the next turret. He was out of the lee now and the wind leaped at him, tugging at his shirt, pulling his hair. Electric ripples of tension were traveling along his spine.

What was it Bush had said about smelling death? It had sounded like just nigger talk at the time but it didn't sound that way now. It was in the air all right. You could smell it all around. That Bush was some nigger all right. A hell of a lot smarter than most white men . . .

The sound of the shots, hollow and long thudding on the wind, brought him up short. He listened to the first two and by the time the third was reverberating among the walls he was racing toward the sound.

He burst out of the corridor into the moon bright quadrangle and saw the man with the gun and flung himself directly at him, knowing it was coming but not waiting for the spurting blossom of flame nor the sharp thunder nor the whine of the ricochet.

Then he had him by the throat and was bending him backward with his thumbs going in right up to the joints and the man flopping like a stranded fish. This time there was no mistake about it; it was Cutter all right and he was trying to get his knee into Flake's groin and Flake was squeezing him all the time and pushing him back. Cutter arched his wiry body and managed to free one arm long enough to punch Flake in the face and Flake growled and took the arm that had punched him and began to bend it steadily back, feeling the bones grating and hearing Cutter howl and then feeling the stiff point beyond which it would

not go and making it go even further so that there was a snapping sound like a dry twig breaking and Cutter let out a little yelp that might have come from a kicked dog and then was still.

Flake stood up, aware for the first time of the sweat soaking through his shirt and the blood running out of his mouth, and remembered the knife and wondered why he had forgotten to use it. Then he thought of Cruze and began to search for him and found him a dozen yards away slumped against the wall. It was a familiar position for Cruze except that now he was not drunk anymore. As soon as Flake touched him he knew he was dead.

He lit a match and held it over the dead man for a moment and saw where the bullets had gone in and then the wind blew it out and he let it drop.

Cutter was groaning. Flake went back to him and chopped him across the face with his fist. He was getting ready to kill Cutter with his hands but he wanted to do it slowly. He hit Cutter on the nose with the edge of his palm and felt the cartilage break and the nose go sideways and saw the blood, black in the moonlight, burst out.

Cutter tried to scream but was unable to and what came out instead was, "Mangio . . ."

"What about Mangio?"

"His idea."

"What idea?"

"Push Flake over."

So that was how it had been. He might have guessed that Cutter lacked the initiative to start things on his own. With Mangio behind him it began to make sense.

"For how much?" Flake said.

"A thousand."

And that was all he was worth. A lousy grand. This scum had been willing to murder him for a lousy thousand bucks.

He hit Cutter again and brought his hand away wet with blood.

"My arm," Cutter moaned.

"Wait till you see what I do to the rest of you. Where's the dough you took out of the box?"

"My pocket."

Flake backed off and kicked him hard in the ribs. Cutter's body jerked and the breath whooshed out of him. Flake kicked him again and turned him over and took out the roll of water-soaked bills. Killing Cutter now would be a mistake. He would take him back to stand trial for the murder of Cruze and to testify against Mangio. That way it would work out all right. It was lousy about Cruze getting it but at least it was over for him and maybe it was better than freezing to death in an alley.

He took Cutter by the collar and hoisted him roughly to his feet. Cutter's knees buckled and Flake straightened him with a slap in the jaw. Cutter's broken wrist hung twisted at a peculiar angle. Flake dragged him across the quad-

rangle toward the beach. He didn't fancy the idea of leaving Cruze lying on the stones but he would have to take Cutter in first. The stones hadn't made too much difference to the rummy when he was alive and certainly wouldn't bother him now.

17.

The Coast Guard PBY plowed a furrow across the lagoon and taxied up to the pier. Flake was standing waiting for them and took their bow line and secured it to one of the pilings. The hatch opened and a tall thin lieutenant came out. It was Huckins. Flake had known him for a long time.

"Hello, Huck."

"What's all the ruckus? We got word you were drowned."

"Not quite."

Flake told him about Cutter and Cruze and the lieutenant looked at Cutter and said, "What ran over him?"

"We had an argument."

Huck sighed. "All right. There isn't much of him left but we'll take what there is."

They handcuffed Cutter to a galley stanchion and carried Cruze's body, still wrapped in the tarpaulin, back aft.

"I'll need statements from the people on the yacht," Huck said to Flake. "You wait here."

Flake sat down on the pier and stared out at the reef. During the night the *Jezebel* had broken up. There was nothing left but a small section of her bow. He no longer felt any regret about her. She had been Mangio's and Mangio was finished. The whole thing was finished.

Then Huck was coming back toward him and with him was Irydia. She was carrying a small plaid suitcase.

"I'm afraid it isn't very much," she said pointing to the suitcase. "But then how much do we really need?"

Flake didn't answer. Huck stood there waiting for them to say something and when nothing happened he shrugged his shoulders and stepped down into the plane.

Irydia took Flake's hand and held it tightly. "What is it, darling?"

"Nothing."

"Don't you want me?"

"No."

"Do you mean that?"

"Yes."

She let go of his hand. Her face had gone very pale. "Then say it."

"Get away from me," Flake said.

"Say it again."

"Get away from me, you whore."

"All right. That's enough."

She picked up the suitcase and began to walk very fast back toward the yacht. He watched her go. She had extraordinarily fine legs.

Huck put his head out of the pilot's window and said appreciatively, "That's a lot of woman."

"Let's get out," Flake said.

18.

Chambers had been watching. It was killing him but he kept watching. It was like pressing on a aching tooth, he had to savor every last bit of pain. But from the expression on her face it was clear that it was not going the way she had planned.

Then he saw her start back to the yacht and he saw Flake get into the plane and his heart stopped pounding and the sweat began to dry on his hands. By the time she reached the yacht he was sitting in his chair with a magazine on his lap and managing to look cool and disinterested.

"Changed your mind?" he asked easily.

She gave him a small, utterly charming smile. "He changed his."

"What did he say?"

"Do you really want to know?"

"Yes."

"He said, 'Get away from me, you whore'."

"I remember that morning we picked him up you said he was quite a man."

"Did I?"

"You were absolutely right, you know."

"All right, Allan."

He stood up and began to examine his face in the small mirror behind the liquor cabinet. "Do I look different to you?" he asked.

"I don't know."

"I feel different. I ought to look different."

She looked at him carefully then and saw that he was indeed different. In the last five minutes his face had changed very much. It was quite astonishing.

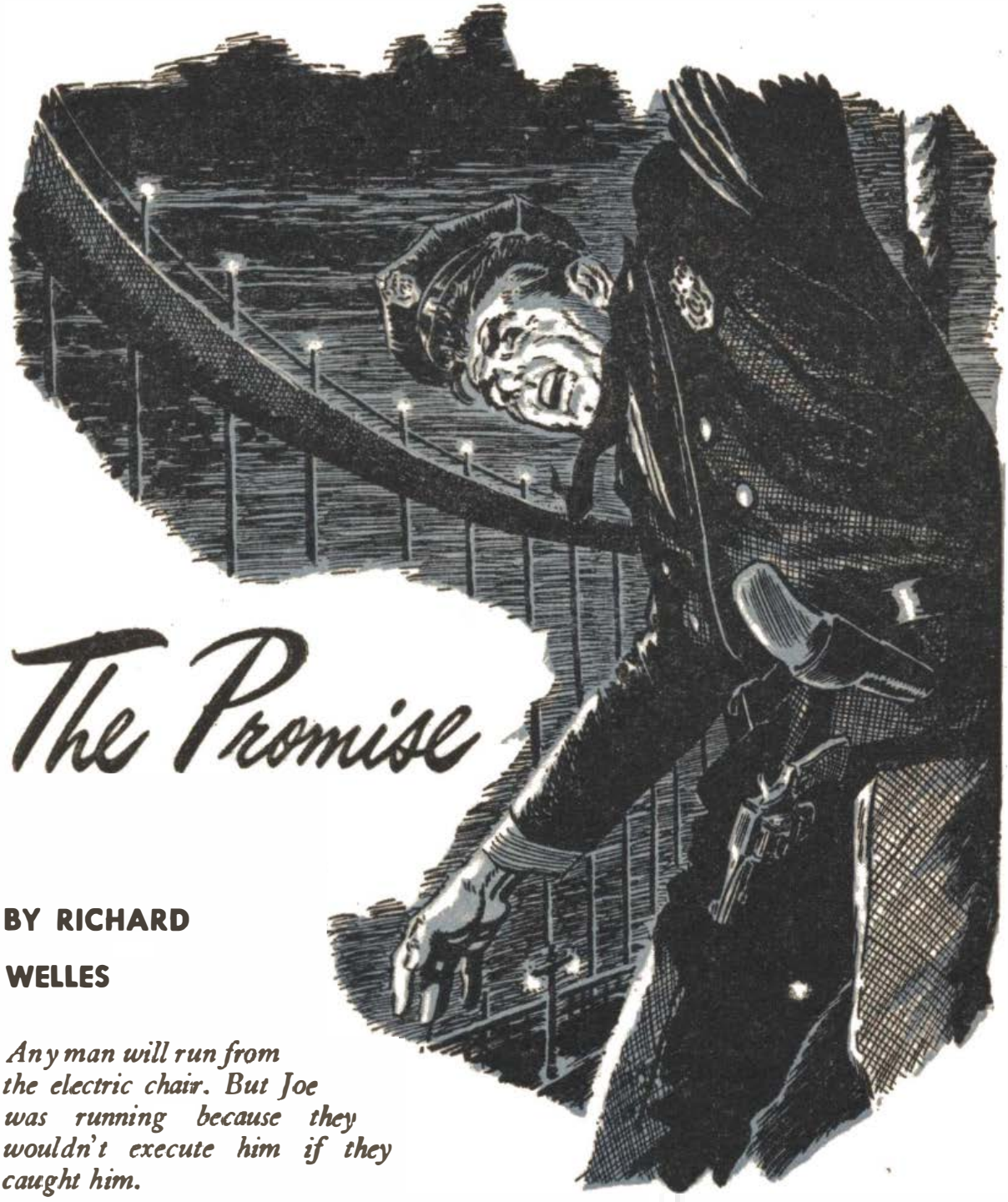
"Let's not talk about it now," she said. "Later on. Not now. Please?"

"Do you know something?" he said cheerfully. "I don't think there's anything to talk about at all. Not ever."

He went out on deck and stood there enjoying the cold, bright air. The plane was a long way off now, small and black against the sun. He watched it until it was gone. Then he smiled.

He wondered if that girl Molly Smith was still sitting on the pier in Key West.

But then he decided that the first thing he had to do when he got back, the most important thing, was to buy a drink for his good friend Flake.



The Promise

BY RICHARD WELLES

Any man will run from the electric chair. But Joe was running because they wouldn't execute him if they caught him.

MY BROTHER Joe was hiding. Somewhere in the shadows of the city he crouched in terror, trying desperately to evade the law, the men who would lock him up.

It's a funny thing, the way different people react to circumstances. Take Joe and me, for instance. During the war he was brave, almost calm in the face of some of the most

brutal fighting men have ever seen, while the toughest battle I fought was against the gnawing fear inside me that told me continually to turn and run. But later on things were different . . .

Toward the end of the war we were both captured and spent eight months in a POW camp. It was no picnic for me, but it was so much of a nightmare to Joe that he cracked completely and was almost crazy by the time the war ended and we got out. I talked to the Army psychiatrist about it, afterwards, and he used a lot of big words, but it wasn't hard to understand. Joe had claustrophobia, something deep down in the recesses of his mind that made being locked up a horror to him.

And that was why he was hiding now.

He was hiding because his wife, Laura, was dead, and so was Nick Mantell, the nightclub entertainer. Joe had come home early that afternoon from work and found them together in his bed. It must have hit him like a ton of steel, Laura and another man, and he got hold of a gun and shot them both. Then he ran.

I thought about this as Sergeant McKean tried to put his feelings into words. "I'm sorry, Al," he said. "I can't tell you how much."

If you're wondering why McKean knew me well enough to call me by my first name, I'll explain, and then you'll understand why the murders hit me doubly hard when I was called in and told about them. Because, you see, Joe came out of the Army and married Laura and got a job in an office, but I came out and became a cop . . .

"What made her do it?" I asked McKean. "What made her cross Joe up for a punk like Mantell?"

"Who knows?" McKean said. "Women do some goddamn queer things at times. Some of them are just born bad, I guess." He looked at me, and put a hand on my shoulder. "Listen, you take a few days off. I'll fix it up."

"No!" I said. "*Don't you realize the one thing my brother fears more than anything else is being locked up?* And he knows this town — he knows what our juries always do when a man commits an unwritten-law murder here. He knows that, some places, a man who kills a cheating wife always gets acquitted, and other places the guy gets the chair like any other kind of murderer, but here juries make a crazy compromise and give the guy guilty with recommendation of mercy — life imprisonment."

I turned away. "Jesus, McKean," I said, "Joe'll never give himself up to any other cop — he'll kill anyone else who tries to take him. That's why *I've* got to go after him and take him in . . ."

McKean didn't answer for a minute. Then he said, "All right, Al. All right. But you understand that we can't just stop dead while you're looking for him."

So the wheels began to grind. All the bus depots and railroad stations were checked, and so were the car-rental companies and airports. Every exit from the city was blocked up tight. And McKean figured they'd get Joe this way.

I didn't go along with the theory. I knew my brother better than anyone else; I knew what he'd do when he realized people were trying to find him and lock him up. His one thought would be to hide, hide someplace where they'd never think to look. Someplace he'd be safe from the men who wanted to lock him up.

I tried to think where he could be. I sat for hours trying to think of where he'd run, and then, suddenly, it hit me.

I got into my car and pushed my way through the traffic toward the river. When I came to the ravine, I pulled up, and stumbled down the steep hill to the dirt road. The bridge was a couple of hundred yards down the road, and when I reached it, I stood there for a minute and looked up.

Three hundred feet above me, the bridge was a black shadow against the crimson of the evening sky. I scrambled over the broken ground to the bridge foundation on the left side of the ravine. There was an old garbage can there, and I inverted it and stood on it, so I was able to reach the ledge where the girders stretched themselves upward and across the chasm. Joe was taller than me; he'd have been able to reach it without the garbage can.

Finally, I reached the top. A catwalk, one yard wide, stretched from one end to the other, with a low handrail running along one side. I stepped onto it gingerly and began to inch my way forward. I was only a foot away from the end when I fell, and for a tense moment I dangled in space, and as I hung there I felt my gun slip from its holster and hit the ground below. It made a crashing sound, doubly loud in the silence, and then I heard a bullet scream past my ear.

"For God's sake, Joe," I yelled. "It's me — Al. It's me." And then there were no more shots and I regained my footing.

I saw him then, sitting there in front of me, his eyes glassy and staring, his hands hugging his knees. He was doing something I hadn't seen him do in twenty years — he was crying.

I walked up to him and took the gun from his hand. "Easy, kid," I said. "Easy. It's all right now."

He couldn't talk for a minute, and then the words came in a rush. "Don't let them lock me up, Al," he said. "You know they'll lock me up for life if you take me back and put me on trial. Promise me you won't let them lock me up — I couldn't take it. Promise me . . ."

Something inside my chest was crushing hell out of me. "I promise," I said. Then I pointed his gun at his heart and pulled the trigger.

MUGGED AND PRINTED

JEROME WEIDMAN (*A Moment's Notice*), author of the famous *I Can Get It For You Wholesale*, was born in New York City and credits his education to the public schools of New York and to the N. Y. U. Law School. It was while studying law that he began to write and, after the publication of his first novel, he decided that, though "writing is dreadful drudgery," he'd rather be an author than a lawyer. Among his books are *What's In It For Me?*, *The Horse That Could Whistle Dixie*, *The Price Is Right* and his latest, *The Third Angel*.

BASIL HEATTER, whose complete new novel, *The Empty Fort*, appears in this issue, has been called "a young Hemingway" by one enthusiastic reviewer of his first best-selling novel, *The Dim View*. He's the son of radio news analyst Gabriel Heatter, and the author of two other novels: *The Captain's Lady* and his new Lion book, *Powder Snow*. Heatter now divides his time between New York and Florida, and divides his occupations into writing and playing tennis. We'll be hoping to bring you more of his fine stories in the future.

B. TRAVEN is perhaps the most famous literary mystery of our times. Even his agent does not know who he is, if B. Traven is his real name, or where he lives. He's the author of *Treasure of the Sierra Madre* and other fine books, including his latest, *The Rebellion of the Hanged*. His stories are forwarded to his agent by a Mexican representative, and all investigations of Traven's real identity stop there, since the representative refuses to give out any information at all. All we can add to these facts is that Traven writes fine stories — and the evidence can be found in his current *Manhunt* story, *Tin Can*.

SAM S. TAYLOR appears to have a peculiar affection for relaxation — as witness the titles of his three Dutton mysteries: *Sleep No More*, *No Head For Her Pillow* and *So Cold, My Bed*. These insomniac titles chronicle the adventures of Neal Cotten, private investigator, who has "an affinity for easy money and screwy cases," to quote a reviewer. Taylor, his wife and one child make their home in Tarzana, California, from whence more fine stories like the current *State Line* will be heading for *Manhunt's* pages. Taylor's affinity for sleep is only expressed in his book titles; he is, as editors and publishers happily agree, a very busy writer indeed.

EVAN HUNTER (*Bedbug*) is the author of *The Blackboard Jungle*, published by Simon and Schuster. It's Hunter's first serious novel, though his suspense story, *Don't Crowd Me*, is still a top seller on the Popular Library racks. ◆ ROBERT PATRICK WILMOT is the author of three novels featuring Steve Considine: *Blood In Your Eye*, *Murder on Monday* and the new *Death Rides A Painted Horse*. He's now at work on a new novel, but found time to turn out the tough and realistic *Some Things Never Change* for *Manhunt* readers. ◆ JONATHAN CRAIG (*Night Watch*) is the author of a new Lion book, *Alley Girl*, based on his *Manhunt* story *Services Rendered*. ◆ RICHARD MARSTEN got the idea for *Every Morning* on a trip to Nassau, paid for by some of the profits on his science-fiction novel, *Rockets to Luna*, and his new Gold Medal book, *Runaway Black*.

—Continued from back cover

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