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# MANHUNT

WORLD'S MOST POPULAR CRIME-FICTION MAGAZINE

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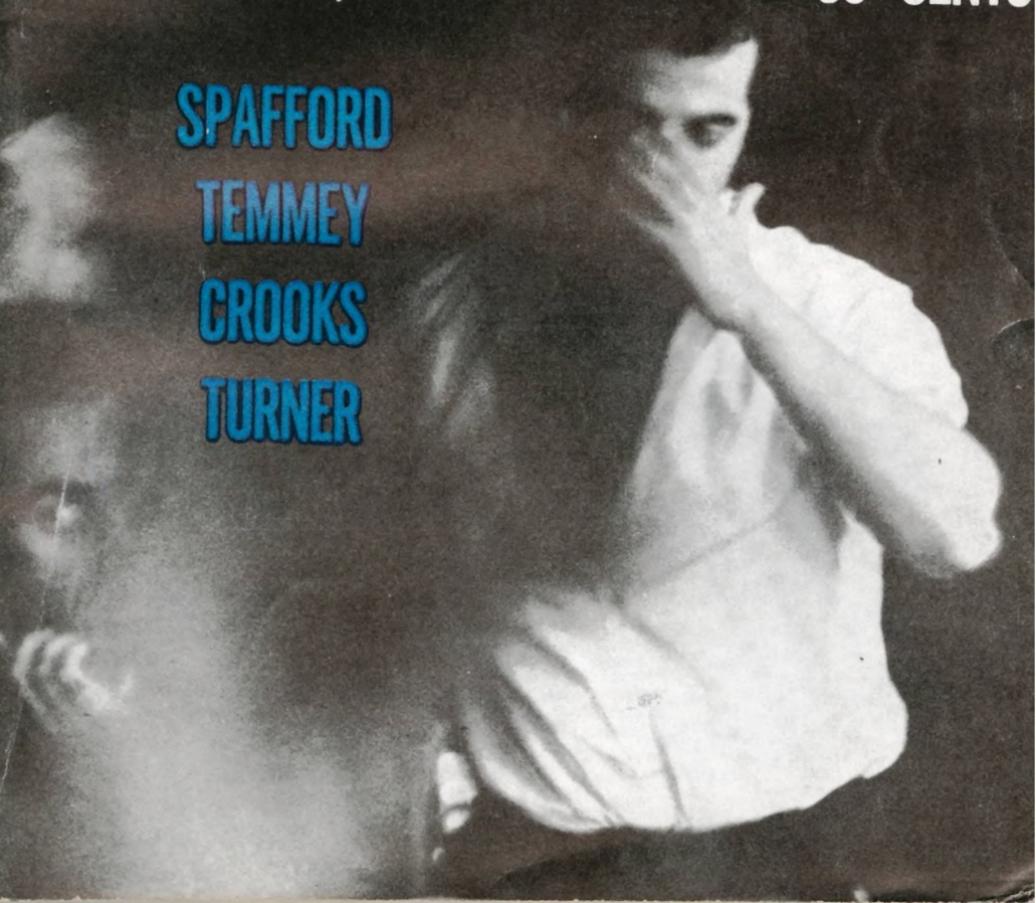
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*the word  
is out .....*

# **GET MAN— HUNT**

**160 pages  
of  
MAYHEM  
MISCHIEF  
MURDER  
MALICE**

*see back cover*

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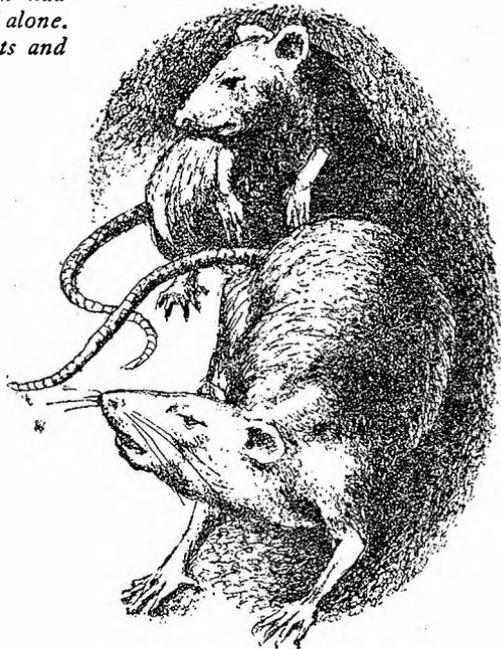
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*It was an obsession. This man had died in the woods, in a cabin, all alone. When they found him, the rats and weasels had . . .*

# bury me proper

BY GEORGE H. BENNETT



IT was late afternoon when Miss Dolly Freeman saw him come running up from the cold low-ground waving his arms, Aubrey Gilliam from across the frozen creek. Miss Dolly drew water from the well and gave him a dipperful in the yard when he got there. Aubrey drank in large gulps, belching.

"Is something awfully wrong, Aubrey?" She remembered the hounds singing all night and half the day. "Did Little Billy Boy get worse?" Aubrey rolled his blue eyes round and exhaled steam. So Billy Boy was finally dead. It seemed a curse upon the Gilliams. "Aubrey, I feel sorry for you . . .

first Liza, now Billy. Come inside, have something strong to drink before you catch your death of cold." They were both thirty years old; they had known each other all their lives, Aubrey and Miss Dolly.

"Dolly, this thing has me undone . . . I don't know what to do!"

"Hurry on inside before you catch cold," she said. She took his arm and led him to the living room where a fire lay on the hearth. "Have you notified Mr. Ben Cohen yet?" she said. "He's the coroner . . . with Billy Boy dead, I'm sure he'll want to know."

"I've told nobody but you, Dolly.

I went in with his dinner things a while ago and found him dead . . . same as Liza when she died. I knew he was dead soon as I went into the room."

Miss Dolly fixed coffee and served it with brandy from last year's apples. Aubrey drank his noisily, and she was pleased to see some of the color come back to his cheeks. He was still a fine specimen of a man, Miss Dolly mused, although twelve years of marriage to Liza had hollowed his cheeks and took some of the curl from his brown hair, and somewhat softened that devilish gleam in his blue eyes. But he was, yes, still a man that'd make a woman stand up and holler just from the low-down way he could wink his eye and grin.

She saw him staring far off into the fire, as if he was thinking about something deeper and more sorrowful than the death of his young son, and she said, by way of bringing him back to her, "Mr. Cohen is sure to want to know."

He waved his hands helplessly. "Dolly, I'm all broke up. I couldn't sit down to write a letter now. You know how to go about this, you wrote when Liza died."

Liza, that was the wife's name. She died in hot summer. Miss Dolly remembered the humus small in church, how flies worried Liza's musky florals. Nobody seemed to care, Aubrey least of all. They rushed to get her under-

ground before she stank. But there would be no hurry with Billy; cold weather would keep him until ground could be broken. Miss Dolly sat down to the letter.

"How old was Billy Boy?"

"Just a baby boy, Dolly, just nine years old. I was counting on him to bury me after Liza died. That's one reason I didn't mine so much losing her. I never thought I'd be the one to bury Billy."

To her remembrance, she had not seen him cry before . . . certainly not at Liza's funeral. Thinking back, she wondered if hounds had warned of that death. She did not remember, and it seemed important to remember. She asked Aubrey.

"I think they did, Dolly. But I'm not sure, either. I seem to remember hearing them howl like they usually do when somebody's dying."

"But you don't recollect for sure?"

He shook his head, and she liked the way the brown curls tumbled down his forehead. "Death's the only thing I'm sure about any more. First Liza, then the boy, going one right after the other like that."

"We've all got to go some time, Aubrey."

Dolly finished the letter and poured more coffee. She dragged her chair to the fire with his.

"I admire a woman like you, Dolly. Living here by yourself, no man around to do for you. Don't

you ever get lonely sometimes? Don't you ever get to wondering who's going to bury you decent?"

Miss Dolly grunted. "Decent, indecent . . . I don't think it makes much difference, once you're dead."

Aubrey bent and spat into the fire. "Oh you're a hard one all right. Everybody around says the same thing, the way you can sit down and dash off a letter to Mr. Ben Cohen without batting an eye. *Oh that Dolly's hard as nails*, that's what everybody says."

She would not meet his eyes. "Aubrey, you've got the letter for Mr. Cohen . . . isn't that what you came for? And I'm sorry Billy's dead. But it's getting late now, and I've got a mess of things to do."

He gave her his cup. "I'm not through yet, Dolly. I'd like some more coffee. I've come here to arrange something with you."

His devilish eye made her nervous; she slopped coffee into the cup and gave it back.

"It only took you thirty years to grow from a sassy little girl to a sour old woman, Dolly. Marriage would've kept you sweet and young. No, don't frown like that. Listen to what I have in mind." He grabbed her hand in his large paw and squeezed it.

"Don't, Aubrey. I'll have nothing to do with your crazy plans."

She broke from his hand and went to the window. The evening

sun was dropping behind the distant mountain. Aubrey came and stood beside her. "Is it crazy because I want somebody to bury me, somebody strong? Didn't I tell you about the fellow that died out in the mountains, up in some hunting cabin in the middle of the woods? He died all alone out there by himself. When they finally found him, his body had started to rot . . . what was left of it. Weasels and rats, all other kinds of animals, had started eating. . . ." He twisted and squinted in her face, but she looked at the cold ground, drew her eyes away.

"You told me the same story," she said, "when we were children together in school. You told me when Liza died. You've told it to me a thousand times."

He sighed, and she saw his big chest swell like a barrel before his breath came blowing against her neck with a gentle caress, bringing the vintage of mellow apple orchards to her wide nostrils. A real man, she thought . . . a real fine figure of a man.

She said, "Aubrey, you just want to make sure that I'll bury you in case everybody else is dead."

He put his hand on her shoulder, but drew it away when she stiffened. "You're smart, Dolly, always have been. Well, Billy Boy's dead . . . I'd put all my hopes in him. I didn't want to have to come to you this way. But you're the only one left I can depend on."

She turned, went back to the fire. He followed her, and they sat down together on the settee.

"I thought all your talk was done in fun!" she cried. "I remember in high school . . . Lord, that's been a long time ago. . . ! *Dolly*, you said, *I want you to promise to bury me when I die*. I thought you were proposing marriage, but when I mentioned marriage, you just laughed and married Liza. Well, you see what it got you?"

There was a round swimming in her head; it seemed the culmination of an old dream.

Aubrey squinted at her. "Did my marrying Liza hurt you a whole lot, *Dolly*?"

Her hands trembled like an aspen; she hid them inside her apron. Could she tell him about the "sickness" she went away for? Of creeping down hospital corridors in the middle of the night, searching for an end to the misery of living without him, without his wanting her? Of how her heart had burst like a popcorn seed over fire when she finally came home and found that Aubrey and Liza were already married and that Liza was going to have his child? She wanted to tell him all about the meaning of being hurt, but the wound was still an open sore, and she would not trust herself to speak.

Aubrey fell to his knees in front of her in the old-style country fashion. Filled with a vague horror of what she knew he was going to

say, Miss *Dolly* squeaked, and tried to scoot away from him across the settee. But Aubrey held her this time with a damp hand, and she could feel the excitement of his pulse beating rhythm with her own.

"*Dolly* girl, I want you to marry me."

Suddenly, her eyes were full of tears. Her voice broke into a high laugh. "Aubrey, that's a cruel thing to say! Asking me to marry you after all these years. . . ."

"You were my first love," Aubrey said contritely.

"Then why'd you marry Liza instead of me?" It was a question she had wanted to ask him for a dozen years.

He laughed wryly. "You really want to know?" She nodded, and he went on. "Because Liza was a right strong woman in her young days. You remember how strong Liza was? Why, she could almost split a log in two with one chop of the axe, almost like any man." He glanced sideways at her. "You always struck me as being kind of peaked, *Dolly*. I wanted me a strong woman, somebody'd who'd live a long time. . . ."

"To bury you when you died," *Dolly* finished for him. "And yet, I've outlived not only Liza, but your son as well."

He nodded. "I have to give it to you, *Dolly*. You were a whole lot stronger than I figured. I'm always willing to admit when I've made a mistake. I sure should have mar-

ried you instead of Liza."

He was still kneeling in front of her, and when he nodded, the brown curls again fell to his forehead. But this time, she did not find him beautiful and appealing, and the thing that she did feel surprised her.

She wondered if the man she had loved and cried for and gnashed her teeth over for all these years was really a man after all.

It struck her that she had been in love with a devilish ghost, a dream with brown curls and a wicked grin. But not with a man.

The thought was so funny that she felt almost like laughing, and she would have, if she had not remembered the tragedy of loving a selfish boy, and the terrible thing it had done to her.

"Aubrey," she said, "don't you know how to *love*? Did you really love Liza when you married her?"

He shrugged. "I guess I did."

And she knew with a certainty that he did not. A man knew how to love. A boy like Aubrey could only guess. Suddenly, she almost despised him.

He snickered, in boyish embarrassment. "But, you know, as long as we're being honest like we are, I'll tell you something, Dolly. You know, there were times when I'd look at Liza and I'd find myself wishing she was dead." He dropped her hand, and shifted his position on the floor at her feet so that the firelight burned like blue

coals in his eyes. Dolly felt grandmotherly, and tired. She wished he would stop talking and leave her be so that she could forget the sour taste of loving a little boy dressed up like a man.

"Aubrey," she said sternly, "you better get up off the floor before you catch cold."

But he went on talking, as if he had not heard her. "If you want to know the truth, Dolly, I gave up on Liza way before she died. I saw her getting weaker and weaker, and I knew I'd made a bad deal. So I turned my attention to the boy. When Liza finally died, me and Billy Boy was out fishing together. I'd never really got along with the boy," Aubrey said. "So I was trying to get to like him . . . to get *him* to like *me* . . . so I wouldn't have to die alone somewhere. . . ." He scrunched around and gazed at her in the fetching way, Dolly thought, of an old hound appealing to its master. "Dolly," he said, "you see now why I want you to marry me? You do see, don't you? You remember my telling you about the fellow that died out in the mountains, up in some hunting cabin in the middle of the woods. . . ?"

But she could only stare at him in stark disbelief while he told the story again.

"Dolly?"

"Aubrey, you don't want a wife! What you need to marry is an *undertaker*, somebody with the whole setup for burying dead people."

But he seemed not to understand the horror that she felt, for he said again, "Dolly, I love you. I want you to marry me. I don't care what you might've done in the past. . . ."

It was a strange thing for him to say, for him to accuse her.

For one tense moment, there was naked silence in the small cabin room as they faced each other with the squat settee between them—he, with his head cocked to one side and his blue eyes inspecting her quizzically, wondering if she understood the full portent of what he had said; Miss Dolly, straight as a ramrod, suddenly content and without restlessness for the first time in twelve years.

So, he wanted her to marry him. "I'll marry you, Aubrey. I think we ought to have a drink to seal the bargain." Her laugh was rich with triumph. "We'll drink some of my real good brandy, what I keep for special occasions."

He would have followed her to the kitchen, but she stayed him with an imperious hand. "Wait by the fire," she said, using much the same tone as she might have used with an old hound that whimpered behind her and got underfoot.

Aubrey waited by the fire as she had ordered him to. But she took such an uncommonly long time in the kitchen, that he became restless; and he called to her in a loud voice. "Dolly, you know what I was doing when Billy Boy died?"

She came back to the living room

then, carrying two glasses of amber-colored brandy. She handed one to him and set hers near him on the arm of the settee, while she stooped and poked in the fire.

"When Billy Boy died, Aubrey? Why, weren't you with him?"

"Naw . . . I was out courting, trying to find me a wife."

She threw another log on the fire. "At that hour of the morning?"

"How did you know he died this morning, Dolly? I didn't say a thing about the *time* Billy Boy died. For all you know, he might have died this afternoon, just before I came running here."

She chunked a few more times in the fire, her head tilted to one side, secretly watching him from the corner of her eye.

"Drink your wine, Aubrey," she said pleasantly.

"How did you know, Liza? Is it because you sneaked over there and smothered little Billy Boy with a pillow, the same way you smothered Liza?"

"Drink your wine," she said.

But he kept on talking. "You're a strong woman, you'd have no trouble suffocating a frail sick woman like Liza, somebody as small as Billy Boy."

She turned just in time to see him switch the glasses of wine.

And she knew then that it was all over, that the anguish of a dozen years would soon come to an end.

"Aubrey," she said, "it seems that

I've hated you forever. And in the middle of my hate, there'd come a remembrance of when I didn't hate you . . . of when I loved you . . . like the clouds that roll back and show a pinch of blue sky on an overcast day. But those moments were rare, Aubrey. Most of the time I hated you. And that hate spilled over, the older I got, until I hated Liza and Billy Boy, too."

"Why?" he said.

"Because they were yours, or a part of you." She picked up the wine glass he had traded with her, and drank the liquid down at once. "You thought I'd poison you, Aubrey?" She smiled scornfully. "Poison is a weak woman's way. I want you to suffer a long time, Aubrey, and to die alone, like the man in the cabin you're always talking about."

He jumped to his feet and tried to embrace her. "Dolly, it doesn't matter to me what you did before," he cried. "I need you now . . . I need someone!"

She pulled away. "You'd marry me any way, thinking like you do that I murdered your wife and son?"

"I'm not accusing you, Dolly. It's just that Mr. Ben Cohen did an autopsy on Liza after she died that way. He found bits of lint in her lungs . . . he said that could only have come from her being smothered by a pillow. I knew a long time ago how she died."

Dolly nodded. "And Billy Boy?"

"Somebody killed him the same way . . . this morning, like I said . . . while I was out looking for me a wife. . . . Did you kill them, Dolly?"

"I killed them," she said.

He seemed to go weak in the knees. "I'd never have believed it, Dolly. Why? Why would you want to do a thing like that?"

"Because of the baby, Aubrey. You know what my sickness was, why I really went away that summer after high school? To have a baby, Aubrey . . . your baby. I didn't say anything about it to you then because you'd already announced that you and Liza were going to get married."

He shook his head in disbelief. "A baby," he said. "What happened to it?"

"Dead," Miss Dolly said. "I was away for nearly a year, if you remember. I was in the hospital when I heard that you and Liza had married. The baby . . . your baby, Aubrey . . . was born a little while after that. I was in the hospital . . . I tried to kill it then, but there were too many doctors, nurses, too many people watching. So I waited until they sent me home . . . and I smothered it one morning with a pillow. I couldn't bear the shame of coming back here with a baby, and me not being married. The Sheriff there said it was an accident, the baby's being smothered. . . ."

Aubrey slapped her. He slapped her so hard that her hands flew up

and the empty wine glass shattered around her feet.

"All right, Sheriff," she heard him cry, "you boys can come on in now."

And then, surprisingly, as she tried to clear her vision, she saw Mr. Ben Cohen and the uniformed Sheriff with his two deputies coming through the door. *Witnesses*, her mind dully recorded. *He tricked me into confessing with witnesses listening outside in all that cold. . . .*

"Whew, boy, I thought you'd never get her to admit those murders," Mr. Ben Cohen said. "Lucky thing you came to me this morning when you found the boy dead."

Vaguely, as if from a great distance, she felt the Sheriff's heavy hand on her shoulder, and heard his voice drawling, "Dolly Freeman, in the name of the Commonwealth, I arrest you for the murder of Liza Gilliam, William Gilliam, and the infant child born to you at Sedgewick Hospital on the 12th of December in the County of . . ."

Mr. Ben Cohen and Aubrey were alone now in the cabin. Aubrey stood at the window. Although night was fast approaching, he could still see the Sheriff and his deputies herding Dolly Freeman back down the hill and across the frozen creek to his own farm at the top of the farther rise where they had parked the official black limousine that had brought them all

from the County seat. He saw them disappear into the lowground; then, in a few moments, he saw the four figures silhouetted against the darkening sky as they emerged again near his farm.

"That's how she knew I was gone," Aubrey said to Mr. Cohen. "She could stand right here at the window and see me every time I left home. So she knew when Liza and Billy Boy were there alone."

Mr. Cohen clapped him warmly on the shoulder. "You did a good job, son. We've been suspicious of her ever since her baby died. But tell me . . . have you ever thought about going on the stage?" Mr. Cohen said, half jokingly. "You almost had me fooled there for a while, all that talk about wanting somebody to bury you. . . ."

But Aubrey's mind was already ticking off the names of women around who might marry him. "I wasn't fooling about that," he said. "I wasn't fooling one bit."

He gazed at Mr. Cohen with his hollow blue eyes dulled by a lurking fear. "You see, I heard this story once," he said, "about a fellow that died out in the mountains, up in a hunting cabin in the middle of the woods. He died all by himself. When they finally found him, well, the weasels and rats had been having themselves a real feast. . . ."

But Mr. Cohen was impatient to be going. "It's getting darker by the moment," he interrupted gently. "I expect they're waiting for us over

there at your place . . . it's a long drive back to the County seat. Don't you think we'd better be going?"

Aubrey shook his head. "Mr. Cohen, I'm all broke up about this thing . . . I couldn't go home right now. I think I'll stay here awhile."

"Well, you'll be hearing from us in two or three weeks," Mr. Cohen said. He left, and went walking fast down the twilight hill toward the creek and the darker lowground.

Aubrey's hands and knees were shaking. He was desperately in need of a drink. He gulped the brandy that Dolly had given him . . . and the pain hit him in the stomach almost at once.

"Dolly, you poisoned me!" he screamed, and reeled for the door. But the poison was already acting on his limbs, numbing them, swelling his tongue until he could not move, or scream again. He crumbled to the floor near the fireplace.

Only his brain remained active as the seeping death crept over him.

*She was always smart, that Dolly, he thought. Her drink had the poison all the time . . . she was expecting me to be suspicious and to switch glasses on her. Yes, she really is a tricky one,* he thought, almost with admiration. *And strong . . . she would have made a real good wife. . . .*

But then, his frightened eyes noticed that the fire had died long ago in the hearth. At first, he could hear only a rising wind whistling down the chimney.

*There was this fellow that died all alone in a cabin,* he thought.

And then his mind screamed a shrill warning as the hungry whispers of weasels and rats mingled with the laughing wind.

They were always hungry at this time of year . . . they could smell him down here, the odor of his dying.

His heart revolted, and scudded to a stop as the first of them dropped, with an obscene thud, to the cold hearth.



**I**T WAS a perfect plan. Not one flaw—from beginning to end—not one little flaw. I had spent long months planning it, working out the smallest details to perfection. I had even made five dress rehearsals which were all successful and the funniest thing about this whole affair was that it was so simple.

nondescript, late model car; nothing flashy or expensive looking, just good dependable transportation. I had stolen the car last night and it wasn't likely that it was on the "hot sheet" yet but just in case, I had even switched license plates.

It was a warm morning and I could feel my fingers begin to sweat

*All that glitters ain't necessarily gold.*

# fair X change

**BY PATRICK SHERLOCK**

It was so simple that it couldn't fail.

I kept telling myself this as I drove out to the airport but I couldn't shake that feeling you always get before a job. The car I was driving was hot but I didn't have any worry on that score. I had very carefully selected a dark colored,

inside the thin pigskin gloves as I nervously gripped the wheel. I rolled down the window and slipped over into the slow lane as I glanced down briefly and saw the speedometer needle drop below the posted speed limit. No sense in breaking the law when you don't have to, I thought.

As I passed by the hangars on the outskirts of the airport, I felt those little things in my stomach begin to flap their wings violently. "I can't miss," I told myself, "This time I can't miss; it's a sure thing, like money in the bank."

I pulled up to the gate at the parking lot, got a check from the attendant and drove through. I squeezed into a slot between two other similarly nondescript cars and cut the motor. I glanced briefly in the rear-view mirror and rolled up the windows. Reaching into the back seat I took out the black gladstone suitcase and one of those small airline bags with the adjustable straps. Stepping out of the car, I pressed the button on the self-locking door and slammed it shut, and removed my gloves. I set the straps so the airline bag hung loosely from my left shoulder and carrying the black gladstone in my right hand, I headed across the parking lot toward the terminal building looking no different than any of the thousand other passengers that would be passing through the airport during this day.

The big clock in the main lobby read 9:21 A.M. I checked my watch and it was right but I was nine minutes ahead of my schedule. I sat down in one of the rows of benches and tried to make myself slow down and relax. I killed the nine minutes by alternately dragging on a cigarette and wiping the perspiration off my face. I

had to force myself to remain seated until the minute hand on my watch finally reached the half hour mark.

I stood up and walked the entire length of the lobby until I came to the baggage claim area. The room was empty now, but had I arrived here nine minutes earlier it would have been full of redcaps, airline agents, and arriving passengers waiting to claim their luggage. It was a perfectly planned job, a sure thing, just as long as I stuck to the schedule and didn't get careless or over-anxious.

I glanced around casually to make sure no one was in the area and then walked swiftly to a row of public check lockers. I pushed the gladstone into the nearest one, slid a quarter into the slot, locked the door and removed the key. I walked back down the lobby still carrying the airline bag over my shoulder, stopping occasionally to glance curiously at the information boards behind the airline ticket counters.

As I approached Trans-State Airlines I checked my watch, 9:45, I was right back on schedule again. I paused at the Trans-State information board and saw that flight 32 would arrive on schedule at 11:05. It was very important to me that flight 32 arrived on time. "Everything is on schedule," I told myself, "Nothing can go wrong now."

I walked to the center of the lobby and rode the escalator to the

second floor. Off to my left, ran a long hall which housed dozens of concessionaires shops and to my right was a large expensive looking restaurant. Directly in front of me was a large arrow pointing to my left and below it, a sign which read: All departing and arriving flights and shops. I turned to the left and walked past several doors until I came to one marked: Gentlemen, and I pushed it open. The room was empty so my luck was still running good. I straightened my tie in the mirror and brushed some lint off the sleeves of my bright checkered sport jacket. My shoes were well shined and my black trousers were impeccably creased.

Satisfied, I walked outside and began a slow examination of the shop windows, but when I came abreast of the small enclosure which housed TRASK & CO., I suddenly became occupied with lighting a cigarette and walked past without looking in. I didn't have to, I'd been studying it for months and I knew every inch and crack of that office as well as I knew my own room.

On the window in 12 inch block letters was the name: 'TRASK & CO.' and beneath that but in smaller letters: 'FOREIGN CURRENCY EXCHANGE'. Also in the window was a small sign which read: Money orders and travelers checks—Issued and Cashed. I didn't have to look inside to see the short, gray

haired guy behind the counter or the middle-aged, flabby guard in his blue uniform. I didn't have to because I knew they'd be there and I knew that at 10:30 an armored car would deliver \$35,000 in 5's, 10's and 20's to Trask & Co. for the weekend returnees at the end of their vacations, who would want to convert their Francs, Pounds and Liras into greenbacks. And I also knew that at 11:00 exactly, the chubby guard would take his daily twenty minute coffee break.

Just beyond the last shop, the hall turned abruptly to the right and became a gaily lit passageway leading out to the arriving and departing flight gates. Small clusters of people stood idly waiting at the gates and from somewhere within the building, a woman's deep, sultry voice announced the boarding of the 10:30 Jet to London and Paris.

It was now 10:10 and I noticed that my fingers were trembling. I walked back down the hall and turned up the stairs leading to the observation deck. At the top, I inserted a dime, pushed through the turnstyle and walked out onto the deck. There were a few people up there but not too many at this early hour of the day. I strolled to the railing and watched the passengers boarding their planes. Quick stepping, vacation-bound families and trudging, worry-burdened businessmen poured from the gate, crossed a strip of oil stained ramp

and filed up the stairs to their magic carpet.

As I stood watching them, it occurred to me how very lucky they all were and once again I was filled with my old companion—envy. They all possessed something valuable; something that I've always lacked and never been able to acquire. They had a destination; they were going somewhere, to someone, while I had no place to go to and no one to go to. I'm a loner, I've always been one and that's the way I want it, so I'm not complaining but there are . . . well, there are times that I sometimes wonder what it would've been like if I had been able to become a nine-to-five and go the whole bit, you know, wife and kids, mortgage and car payments and backyard cookouts . . . ah hell, I probably would have been a lousy father and a worse husband. What kind of influence would I have been for kids; I'm a fast buck guy. Easy money and fast living, that's my kind of life.

I looked at my watch again, 10:30. Below me, the plane door was shut and some guys in white coveralls were pushing the stairs away. I waved nonchalantly to an imaginary friend on board and turned away. I walked across the deck to the street side and glanced over the rail. The armored car was parked at the curb, right on schedule. Everything had been right on schedule so far; it was a good sign. This was going to be easy money.

There was an open air snack bar by the exit stairs and the thought of a good cup of black coffee appealed to me. The kid behind the counter gave me no more than a passing glance when he took my dime and handed me a paper cup full of coffee, so I knew he'd never remember me. The coffee was hot and strong and it did a lot to help my nerves. My fingers weren't shaking anymore and those things in my stomach had crawled back to wherever they go when a guy is cool. The weight of the .45 in the airline bag hanging from my shoulder was as comforting as the presence of an old dependable friend, which is what he was. I knew every screw and spring in his well oiled little body. I must have taken him apart and cleaned him a thousand times; we were on very intimate terms.

The clock behind the snack bar showed 10:52. It was almost time for me to make my move. In thirty minutes it would be all over and I'd be \$35,000 richer. I stood by the railing and stared at the sky and waited. Five minutes later a speck dropped from the clouds. It grew in size and shape until I could finally make out the familiar silhouette of a plane. It circled the airport in a slow lazy bank and then glided down the last two miles in a long sloping decline; its wheels now visible and its flaps down. Its wheels touched down easily and as it shot past me I could make out the

'Trans State' lettering on the side of the fuselage. I looked at my watch and smiled; it was now 10:59.

As I went back through the turnstyle, I could hear that deep sultry voice on the loudspeaker again, only this time she was announcing the arrival of Trans State flight 32. It was exactly 11:00 o'clock.

I paused on the stairs and removed the .45 from the bag. I took the loaded clip from my pocket, shoved it into place and jacked up a shell. This time it would work, I knew it would I'd put a lot of time and sweat into this job and it couldn't fail. I wouldn't let it; I'm a three time loser and a guy that's took three falls hasn't got a thing to lose. During my last stretch, an old con had taught me three basic rules for a successful heist: plan carefully, execute swiftly and escape safely. My mistakes in the past all fell into this last category but now I had the perfect getaway; this time I could brazenly walk through a division of cops and they wouldn't even look at me.

At the foot of the stairs, I turned to the left and walked down the hall, stopping in front of the office of Trask & Co. I looked at my watch again; it was 11:02. I had exactly 18 minutes before the guard returned and approximately 6 minutes before the deplaning passengers from flight 32 passed by here on their way to the baggage claim area. I walked inside and stared at the lit-

tle old guy who looked up at me inquisitively through steel rimmed glasses.

"Good morning." He said, "What can I do for you?"

"You know the routine Pop, same as in the movies. Just keep your hands in sight and don't make any sudden moves."

His eyes widened and he looked down and saw the big automatic in my fist. His mouth hung slack and he stared stupidly at the .45 as I pushed him towards the office in the rear. He looked like he was about to faint, so I grabbed his arm and was surprised at the frailty of his body. He stumbled against the safe and turned to me with actual horror in his eyes. I'd never seen fear quite like that before and it made me feel uneasy.

"Open the safe" I ordered.

"Please . . . please don't kill me."

"Just open the safe, Pop, and you won't get hurt. All I want is the money."

I tried to make my voice sound a little more human. I didn't like scaring him like this; he was a pretty old guy. He bent down slowly and spun the dial with palsy-like fingers and when he pulled the handle, the door remained locked.

"I . . . I must have missed, I . . . I'm sorry."

He tried again and I glanced at the clock on the wall: 11:10. The hall outside was probably full of

passengers by now. He pulled at the handle again but it still didn't open.

"Goddamnit old man, you're stalling." I snarled. "Get that door open or I'll blow your head off."

"No . . . no please," he begged, "I'm . . . just scared . . . my fingers are shaking."

"This is your last chance Pop, get it open or else." I said, glancing nervously at the front door.

His fingers began playing with the dial again and this time the door swung open when he pulled on the latch. I pushed him aside roughly and reached into the safe and withdrew the two sacks of money. The old guy was looking at me uncertainly.

"Lay down on your stomach, Pop, and when I leave here I don't want to hear any alarms."

He scrambled down onto his stomach as I crammed the money in the airline bag and backed toward the door. He looked like he wouldn't have moved for a month if I had told him not to. I tucked the .45 under my belt, buttoned the sport jacket around it and walked casually through the outer office. It was now 11:16; the timing had been perfect. A little closer than I had planned but perfect nonetheless. I opened the door and fell into the stream of flight 32 passengers in the hall. I walked briskly along trying not to hurry and thinking about the \$35,000 that I carried.

At the men's room, I pushed the

door open and walked into one of the stalls and locked the door. I stripped off my sport jacket, tie and the detachable white collar of my shirt and pulled the reversed white collar from the bag and hitched it behind my neck. Then I hooked on the black dickie and slipped into the matching black suit jacket while I stuck the gun, sport jacket and tie back into the bag on top of the money and zipped it. I stepped in front of the mirror and tore off the adhesive mustache and stuck it in my pocket.

When I opened the door and joined the tail end of the flight 32 passengers in the hall, it was 11:22. Halfway down the escalator, an alarm went off; that would be the guard returning from his coffee break. By the time we had reached the baggage claim area, there were sirens screaming from all directions outside. The Police would be looking for a man with a mustache wearing a sport jacket and I smiled contentedly to myself because none of them, not even the most cynical cop would be suspicious of a priest.

I moved carefully through the crowd till I reached the check lockers and removed my black gladstone. By now the bags were off the plane and the passengers were claiming them and moving out into the street. I moved outside with them, letting myself drift with the tide of passengers whose destination I knew would lead me to the cab line.

But the line was empty; there wasn't a cab in sight. This had been the one slight flaw in my plan: depending on a cab for transportation and chancing a delay at the scene of the crime if none were immediately available. But since everything so far had come off so smoothly, I wasn't particularly worried. As a matter of fact, I felt rather safe and snug. There were about twenty other people standing around me waiting for cabs and I tried to make myself look as impatient and inconvenienced as they did. Two uniformed cops stood a short distance away and stared at us suspiciously. They were looking for a man in a sport jacket, white shirt and tie; and if they found one in this crowd, it wouldn't be me.

Just then another cop came running up and whispered something to them. Then, all three of them turned and looked at me and I glanced away and tried to remain calm. When one of them detached himself from the group and walked towards me, I had to fight down every nerve and reflex in my body to keep from running. My pulse was beating faster and faster, and when I felt his big hand lock itself around my arm, my heart sank down into my stomach and I thought I was going to be sick. What had I done wrong, I asked myself; where did I slip up?

"Will you come with me please." He said, not asked.

"Wh . . . what for, Officer?" I managed to ask.

"Just come with me."

He pulled gently but firmly on my arm and I followed meekly. We were joined by the other two cops and they marched me back into the building. I had nothing to lose now so I decided to try a bluff.

"What's this all about, Officer?" I asked politely.

The cop on my right removed the gladstone from my hand while the other slipped the airline bag from my shoulder. "We'll take care of these for you." One of them said.

"Will you please tell me where you're taking me?"

The older cop looked at me for a long moment and then said, "I'm sorry Father, I thought you'd have guessed by now. There's a dying man upstairs and he's asking for a Priest."

A surge of relief swept over me and I felt some of my self-confidence returning. Outside, a line of cabs had somehow mysteriously appeared and I began to dare hope that I might still pull this off, if I kept my head and didn't panic. With a little more luck and a lot of moxie, I could bluff my way out. Maybe.

"Of course," I said. "Please take me to him; I'll leave my bags down here with the other officers."

I had seen a few guys croak in stir and I remembered the routine the Chaplain had gone through. I

was pretty confident that I could play the role. I followed the cop back through the terminal and up the escalator.

"It's a pretty awful thing, Father." The cop was saying, "Little old guy upstairs in the currency exchange office got held up. Musta been too much for his ticker. He's had a few attacks before but this one looks real bad. The Doc don't think he'll make it."

"That's terrible." I said. "Did you catch the man who did it?"

"Not yet, but we will. The airport sealed up tight; he'll never get through."

We hurried down the hall. There was the usual group of curious on-lookers gathered outside and a big burly cop was trying to make them move on. It was a hell of a thought to have but I wanted that old man to be dead when I got there. I didn't think there was one chance in a million that he'd recognize me but then there was that one chance. The cop cleared a path for us through the crowd. I paused briefly at the door, took a deep breath and walked in.

The room was full of cops and detectives, and they all turned to look at me when I came in. I was able to meet their stares but my poise was slowly slipping. The fat guard in the blue uniform was sitting on a chair in the corner looking sick.

"This way, Father." A man said urgently from the inner office,

"Hurry, there's only a few moments left."

As I passed the fat guard, I was able to catch a few words of his conversation. "Yeah," he was saying to a detective. "At least 30,000, probably closer to 35,000."

I felt a tingle of delight run up my spine when I heard that. I passed by and walked into the inner office. He was laying right where I left him only someone had turned him over onto his back. I knelt down beside him and placed my left hand on his brow and began murmuring inaudibly. The old guy opened his eyes and looked up at me. He looked like hell. His skin was drawn tight across his small boned cheeks and his face had turned a pale, ash-gray color. Even I could tell that he didn't have much more time; he just looked like death.

Suddenly his eyes grew bright with excitement and he tried to talk. I could see the recognition begin to dawn on his face, but by this time I was beyond caring if he recognized me or not. Outside the fat guard was still talking and bits of his conversation were drifting in to me.

"Yeah, it's all there. 35,000 dollars, right where we left it, in the cash drawer under the counter." He was saying, "The guy musta took the two bags of foreign currency we had in the safe and left all this cash."

I closed my eyes and felt sick.

The old guy was whispering hoarsely and a detective had knelt down beside him. "Can you beat that," someone was saying. "35,000 dollars in American money and some clown swipes two sacks of foreign money."

The detective was staring at me now and the old guy kept pointing his finger at me, as he whispered.

"Yeah," someone else said outside. "And all that foreign money's only worth about 78 bucks in greenbacks."

I felt someone's hands grab me by the arm and I was dragged to my feet. There was no resistance left in me; there was no fight left either. There was nothing left in me at all.



**Give...so more will live**  
**HEART FUND**



*He was no seaman . . . they could sense that. But he was big,  
and he moved like a fighter . . . and they could smell danger.*

# BLOOD BROTHER

BY JERRY SPAFFORD



I WIPED the blood off my hands with the big blue and white-spotted handkerchief. The white design spreading out from its center looked like a crushed sea-slug. They come in red colors, too. I wished this one was red. I kept wiping my hands on it like the splotches on them were hot, crimson tar. I got them pretty clean, except around the callouses on my palms. I don't know why I worked so hard at cleaning my hands. They got all slippery again when I raised the Dunlop kid's head in my cupped palms. All my anger and madness flowed away, seeming to keep pace with the life fluid draining from him. I never would have thought the kid had so much blood.

I knelt beside him, one shoulder pressed for balance against the big steel mooring bit which had cracked his skull. The stern deck vibrated beneath my knees with every lift of the churning screw as the ship pitched to a swell. I looked up at the three big men grouped around me. I stared hardest at Stemweather.

"You shouldn't have hit him so hard, Stem," I said. "He's dead."

The big man gave a consulsive start at my words. So did the other two, as if jerked by the same string.

"He had it comin'," growled Stemweather, trying to sound tough to cover his fear. He was scared; I could smell it on him. He added: "Any guy would cheat his

own shipmates got it comin' the same."

"You don't kill a man for cheating at cards," I said.

Stemweather took a step towards me. So did Nova, his brute-faced watch partner. The third man, Joe Piggli, hung back like he always did, but he would side with the winner.

"Who you think you are, of a sudden?" bellowed Stemweather, waving a big fist at me. "You were —"

Whatever he was about to say was interrupted by the sound of running feet thudding along the wooden cat-walk which ran over the deck cargo on the after deck. Two slim young Filipinos from the stewards department came to a sudden halt in the passageway between the docking bridge and bulwarks. Filipinos are crazy about fights. These two must have heard the scuffling and shouting and decided to watch the show. They had no stomach for this one. They cast one quick, frightened look at me and the bloody-faced kid in my arms and another at the three big men clustered around us, fists clenched, and then took to their heels. Stemweather turned to Nova. "Get after them," he growled.

Stemweather was a leader and Nova a follower. He didn't even nod as he took off after the frightened Filipinos. They'd never tell anyone what they'd seen tonight, I knew; not after he got through

telling them what would happen if they did.

Stemweather squatted beside me and thrust a rough hand inside the kid's shirt. As he did so I thought I heard a faint whimper, like a gull's cry. I shuddered, wondering if it was the sound of the kid's departing soul. The big man apparently heard nothing.

"You sure he's dead, Sam?" he asked, his voice gruff.

I nodded, watching him. He shoved me to one side, and grabbed the kid under the shoulders. He looked up at Piggia.

"What y' standin' there for? Grab his feet, Piggy."

Piggia blanched, backing away. "I won't have nothin' to do with this," he squealed, his pink fleshy face screwed up in fright.

"You best do what I tell you," warned Stemweather, his voice flat, an almost cutting edge to it.

Piggia made some more noises in his throat, the kind you hear in a pet shop, but he took hold of the kid's legs. Together they lifted the body and began walking toward the far end of the stern, careful to avoid the neatly-flaked mooring lines which are so treacherous underfoot. Stemweather turned his head toward me, the bright moonlight glittering for a moment on his offset eyes.

"You, Sam," he said, jerking his head at the pool of blood at my feet, "clean up this mess. Break out a fire hose. When you call the en-

gine room for water, tell 'em we had a acid spill on deck. It'll be dry by mornin'."

I nodded, my throat suddenly dry. I wiped my hands again on the soggy handkerchief. They felt sticky and I discovered that I was holding them away from me like I wished they weren't mine. I watched, hearing them grunt as they heaved Dunlop's body to the rail. They gave it a push. I winced at the sound of the splash as it hit the sea. I could almost see the crimson tinge appear in the rolling froth of water surging out from the threshing screw. An image of the kid's limp body, rolling and twisting in the turbulent wash, dead eyes staring up at me from the battered white face, was to haunt my mind until the day I died.

After that, I wouldn't let myself think about it, the Dunlop killing. I trained myself not to think about it. Sometimes though, especially at night on lookout or lying in my bunk, I'd feel the picture of it trying to creep into my brain and force me to take another look. Sometimes I did get this look, and it never was any prettier than the real thing. Most of the time I'd find I could push it away, like I had little hands in my skull, and then I'd keep it away by staring at a star or the lighted tip of my cigarette until my eyes ached and I felt the memory crawl away into the darkness. Nights like these,

when it happened, I'd find I was covered with sweat and had a pounding in the back of my head. But one day it all came back in broad daylight, as clear as if it happened yesterday.

This was on a day hot even for a San Pedro summer. The desert-fried Santa Anna blew down on us from the dry hills wavering in the distance, its dust-laden wind drying and cracking my lips. My eyes were bloodshot, burning from the reflected glare of the bright sunlight glancing off the white paint of the amidship house. Visible heat waves shimmered about the steel decks and superstructure, which first absorbed and then rejected the vast stores of heat discharged by the burning sun. The ship was like a giant oven releasing a continuous blast of overheated air. When someone told me it was coffee time, the traditional twenty minute break accorded seamen, I moved wearily into the shade and sagged on the cap rail by the gangway, Frisco jeans and T-shirt plastered to my skin with sweat. The old prune-faced bos'n, a Creole from Louisiana, stood next to me, body bent in the age-old posture of the seaman standing a step away from another trip or escape to shoreside.

We both watched a big, curly-haired guy coming up the dock, noticing how he kept a wary eye on the loaded, and empty, pallet boards rising and falling at the

ends of the runners extending from out-thrust, low-hung booms. He walked like a fighter, light and easy and always on balance. He swung the two big suitcases in either hand as if their weight was nothing to him. I guessed, as the bos'n probably did, that he was the last minute replacement for an ordinary seaman who'd unexpectedly quit.

"He no seaman," grunted the bos'n.

I didn't pay much attention to the old coot. He said the same thing about anyone who hadn't started under sail. Still, for some reason, his remark made me curious. I turned my head.

"How can you tell?"

"Too proud," he said.

As usual, I was sorry I'd asked. He was always saying things like that; giving you an answer that wasn't an answer. Besides, if he thought the guy coming up the dock was too proud to be a seaman, that meant he thought I had no pride. I'm touchy that way. I take everything personally when it comes to someone being better than me. I think I'm as good as the next guy. Maybe I didn't finish grade school or learn what fork to use in a fancy restaurant, but all those fancy people weren't born knowing everything either. Feeling the familiar resentment rising up within me in a sour flood, as it did whenever I got to thinking like this, I gave the bos'n

a disgusted look and turned back to watch the guy with the suitcases.

Still, as he drew closer, I found myself agreeing with the bos'n. There was something not right about the look on his face. He was staring up at the ship with the hungry gaze of a captain approaching his first command. It wasn't natural for an ordinary seaman, that look. Usually a new man looks like someone who has just signed a contract without reading the fine print. 'The bos'n's right,' I thought. 'This guy smells as wrong as a beached whale.'

I watched him closely as he paused at the foot of the gangway, looking up. Suddenly I felt the hair at the back of my neck stir. There was something familiar about his square-jawed face and the set of his hard, blue eyes. And then I knew! This guy was a bigger copy, much bigger, of the Dunlop kid whom I'd last seen slipping over the stern of a ship almost three years ago. I'd seen him more recently in my dreams, too, and that's why the sight of this guy tied a chain of square knots through my guts. My sweaty T-shirt became clammy, as if a cold breeze had begun blowing at my back.

"I don't like 'm," croaked the bos'n, who had been watching the new man, sizing him up with his wise monkey-eyes. He shifted the bulge of snoose under his lip. "This one, he got the smell o' death about 'm."

"Why don't you go peddle your shrunken heads somewhere else?" I snarled at him. His words didn't untie any of the knots in my belly. I'd caught a whiff of the open grave, too.

The bos'n stared at me, like he was going to say something else, and then shrugged bowed shoulders. Maybe the superstitious old Creole can read my mind, I thought. More likely my thoughts were written all over my face like a navigation chart. I couldn't even be sure if the old clam-mouth knew more about the Dunlop kid's death than he would ever tell anyone. If he did, and had sailed with the kid at some time, then he would guess that the guy with the suitcases was the brother. You couldn't tell with him. But if he knew that much, then he'd figure, like me, that it was pretty odd that the first time Stemweather, Nova, Piggia and I shipped together since the kid was supposed to have been lost at sea, the older brother should turn up on the same ship. I wondered, without any doubt that it had happened, how much he'd paid the other ordinary seaman to quit. Beyond that, I thought, still quivering inside, it didn't take much imagination to figure why he'd want to sail with the four of us. I edged away as he climbed the gangway with long, easy strides. His deep voice, a kind of low growl, tightened the knots in my belly.

"The bos'n or deck delegate around?"

"I bos'n," I heard the Creole answer. "Come, I take you to delegate. You be on 12 to 4 watch."

The canny old bos'n kept Dunlop apart from the four of us the next two days in port. The one time I stood next to him in the forepeak, waiting for the storekeeper to hand us our tools or paint, he ignored me. Another time, when we were loading stores, it struck me that he never uttered a word throughout the usual kidding and complaining the gang always set up when the stores were late and delaying our knocking-off period. He made no effort to be either agreeable or disagreeable to anyone. For the first time I began to wonder if I'd been wrong about him. I was really whistling into the wind that day.

Stemweather, Nova and Piggia spent a great deal of time clustered on the deck in tight shifting knots, whispering together and watching Dunlop through narrowed eyes. I could see that they had no doubt who he was or why he was aboard. Stemweather hauled me into their circle when I happened to pass close by the second day after Dunlop's arrival.

"We gotta watch him, Sam," he growled, rapping a big knuckle against my chest while Nova and Piggia nodded agreement. "He's after the four of us. You're with us, ain't you?"

"You better go back to school, Stem," I growled, not looking at him. "Your arithmetic is all wrong."

He grunted like I'd pounded a fist below his belt line. I heard the other two suck in their breath in surprise. "So that's the way she rolls," said Stemweather, his voice a husky whisper.

"That's the way she rolls," I answered, my voice grating in my throat. I shrugged my arm free of his big hand and walked away, heading amidships. The small of my back tingled until I'd rounded the corner of the house. But I'd steered clear of them for the past three years, and had no intention of altering my course. Not now! Not with a collision in sight.

Next day was sailing day with all its controlled confusion. The shouting, profane longshoremen closed the hatches and the ship's carpenter, with an ordinary seaman to assist, dogged them down with his heavy air gun. We squared up the booms, securing them aloft with runners and guys, flying them. At ten o'clock that Thursday night, October 12th, we let go the lines, cast off the tug outside the breakwater, bound for San Francisco, less than a day's run to the north.

Early the next morning I was tired and irritable as my flashlight picked a narrow yellow path up the foredeck toward the foc'slehead. 'Four o'clock is a lousy time to go

on watch,' I thought. I had the first lookout, and was on my way to relieve the 12 to 4 man. I could see his dim figure in the bow, outlined against the luminous grey sky. A prickle ran up my spine when I recognized Dunlop. I turned off my flashlight, coming to a stop as far away from him as the narrow confines of the bow permitted.

"Okay," I said, my voice sounding gruff.

"Nothing in sight," he answered in the litany of the look out.

I shifted my feet on the wooden grating, waiting for him to leave. He continued to lean on the apron, staring straight ahead, smoking a cigarette. His silence struck me as unfriendly.

The sky overhead was like a shifting, upsidedown, grey-black sea, with the silver of moon a reflected steely blade slicing in and out of the murky billowing sea-clouds. Through the rents it carved, a glittering star would peer down and then blink closed like the eye of a hidden watcher in the night. The dark running waves beneath the bow pounded against the hull like the hollow thuds of an undead corpse battering at its coffin. Watching these waves, the way the splayed, black fingers at their crests seemed to reach for me as the bow dipped closer to the surface of the sea, I wouldn't have been surprised to see the Dunlop kid's dead white face staring up at

me from one of the narrow, dark troughs. Everything about me seemed to have turned drab and gloomy. The decks and bulwarks, hemming me in, were grey and black with pockets of inky shadow. The greyness and blackness of it all, the sea, the sky, the ship itself, seemed to seep into my skin, tinting it the same dull, dead shade. Behind me the faint whine of the wind through the taut guys and stays reminded me of the Dunlop kid's dying whimper as I held his battered body in my arms. When a loud, human-sounding grunt, followed by a loud splash came from beneath the bow, I fell back with a frightened gasp before I realized it was a porpoise broaching the water after it became tired of tickling its tail against the pursuing stem of the ship. Afraid that my action might have given away my thoughts to the silent man next to me, I turned warily toward him. I saw the moonlight glint off his eyes as he turned to look at me.

"Crazy creatures, aren't they, Hansen," he said in his deep, purring voice, watching me.

"Yeh," I answered, making my voice curt. And then I added; "There's still some fresh coffee in messhall if you want some."

He ignored my hint; just leaned there, smoking his cigarette and watching me. Finally he straightened, and for some reason my heart gave a lurch.

"You sailed with my kid broth-

er." It was a statement, not a question. There was no avoiding a reply.

"Yeh," I felt my stomach muscles contract. He was silent a while longer. When he next spoke, it was like he was talking to himself, and he'd forgotten I was even there.

"He was a good kid. A little wild, but in time he'd have settled down. We thought going to sea would be good for him."

I didn't say anything. After a while he turned those glittering eyes on me.

"I heard you tried to help him."

"Who told you that?"

"Oh, I talked to a couple of Filipinos who saw part of it."

I knew what he meant by 'it'. 'So', I thought, 'the Filipinos had talked.' He must have paid them plenty to overcome their fear of Stem, Nova and Piggli. But no amount of money could make them testify in court; I knew that much for sure. No matter how hard Dunlop tried, the official verdict on his brother would remain: Lost at sea. I kept my silence, waiting for his next words. Some of the tension had drained out of me.

"Yes," he repeated. "They told me how you tried to help him. I owe you something for that."

Just that. No recriminations. I relaxed a trifle more. "Forget it," I said, making my voice gruff.

"Not until you have a drink with me in San Francisco." He was silent, like he had more to spill but

didn't know where the scuppers were. I guessed he wasn't enjoying this talk any more than I was. He turned his head away again, and I could feel that he was nerving himself to say something more, something important. "Besides," he added, his voice sounding muffled, "you might be able to tell me something more about how it happened; something you might've forgotten at the inquest."

I felt my neck muscles tighten. When I spoke, my voice had a squeaky sound to it.

"I told everything I know," I said, ashamed of the fear I could hear in my own voice. "I don't know anything else."

"Think about it," he said, his voice gone suddenly soft, but with a dry whisper to it that rustled through my bones. "I wouldn't want to make a mistake."

A 'mistake'. There it was! I knew the mistake meant the evening of the score for his brothers' death. There was no more need for guesswork. I stared at his dim outline in the darkness, trying to hold it up in my mind's eye and measure it against the bulk of bone and muscle represented by Stemweather and his two hulking shadows. Despite the heavy list to Stemweather's side, I found that Dunlop didn't seem to unbalance much. Still, I knew no one man could stand against them.

"You haven't got a chance," I said, blurring it out before a sick

feeling in my belly told me I'd given myself away. I don't know what made me say it. I pressed my clenched fists together, waiting for his next bitter words.

To my surprise, he didn't answer right away. Maybe he'd guessed all along that I knew more than I'd told at the Coast Guard investigation. Whatever his game was with me, it didn't seem like he was going to do anything about it right now. He straightened his shoulders, rubbing at his bruised elbows where they'd pressed too long against the cold steel of the apron. I couldn't see his face in the sudden blackness that had drawn across it when the moon and stars were blacked out by a blanket of dark cloud, but I could feel him staring at me.

"No chance?" he asked, his voice calm again. "Oh, I don't know, Sam. I could run into them one at a time."

I felt myself tense at the meaning of his words. 'One at a time,' I thought. Like he's alone with me now. Was he warning me that he hadn't separated me from the others as he had led me to believe? In the dark I began to clench my fists.

"See you," he said unexpectedly. Turning, he vanished into the night. I was glad to see him go. I've never been afraid of a man before.

The ship made its arrival time in San Francisco right on the nose,

though not without the usual manipulations in speed which always caused friction between the skipper and the engineers. If they have as many arguments over atomic fuel as they do over a barrel of oil, I don't want to be around to get my marrow cooked on a nuclear ship. Anyway, we docked just below the Oakland Bay Bridge at the company pier. It was a good tie-up for once. The pilot knew his onions, or maybe he was just lucky. But, this time, instead of rushing to get cleaned up and dressed to go ashore as I usually did, I found myself dragging my feet in every move I made. Actually the reason for my lagging was that it seemed to me that I had to duck about half the deck department. I wanted to run into Stemweather and his goons about as much as I wanted to meet Frankenstein and his two sons in a dark alley. That went for Dunlop, too. I hoped that by the time I left the ship, they'd have gone; all of them.

I wasted a lot of extra toothpaste and soap. Dunlop was waiting for me at the foot of the gangway. I hardly recognized him. He wore a suit sharp enough to carve his way into a tailors' convention. I felt the old, familiar stab of jealousy that hit me whenever I ran into someone born into an advantage I never had. He wore his clothes like he'd invented them. My blue serge, which I'd always thought was pretty sharp, seemed

to sag and wrinkle and grow old on my back without any middle age in between. What burned me up was the smug way Dunlop wore his suit, as if no one else would look as good in it, even if they could afford the tab.

"We can catch a cab at the gate," said Dunlop, not even saying hello. He didn't look at me directly. His eyes fastened on the top of my head like he was measuring me for a hat.

"Okay," I grunted, staring at a point below his chin. I couldn't help noticing his tie clasp. I'd never seen one like it. It was a small gold leaf, half the size of your little fingernail. The heavy bar of gold holding my own tie began to crush my chest. 'Mine probably cost more,' I remember thinking. But the thought didn't seem to help a bit.

We turned and began walking along the dock. We both read the destinations stamped on the stacks of cargo piled opposite each hatch of the ship as if the shippers depended upon us for delivery. I usually cut through the warehouse. It was shorter, but I guessed it was too dusty and noisy for Dunlop's high-faluting taste, or maybe the fumes from the racing forklifts were too rank for his lordship's dainty nostrils. I knew I was thinking like a kid, but I found myself hating him for making me feel like a slob without saying a word. If someone calls you a slob to your

face, you can do something about it, but if he makes you feel like one without saying a word, it leaves you with a helpless anger deep down inside you. That's the way it is with me. That's the way it was when I saw Dunlop's girl for the first time. I was wide open for a sucker punch, like you always are when you're sore. Whatever it was, at first sight she landed one on my chin that knocked me kicking. No matter what it was, no matter how dumb and impossible it was, it was a score for her, and one that I couldn't forget, even after she turned on me.

It happened unexpectedly, without warning, this first look at Dunlop's girl. He'd just raised his arm to hail a cruising cab when her voice halted his arm in mid-air. He looked like a guy who felt a gun being pressed against his back. I turned and saw her first. She was waving as she stepped out the door of a big black limousine, about a block long. Right away I could see how the sound of her voice calling his name could make him do the Statue of Liberty bit.

I've known plenty of good looking dames all over the world. I'm sort of big and rugged, and they seem to go for my looks. The only thing is, it never lasts like it does with other guys. This girl in every port bit never worked for me. I guess I've got the right chemicals but they're all mixed wrong. I keep experimenting, but it doesn't seem

to change anything. Women just never hang around me very long. Once they take off, they never come back like they do in the movies. The truth is—I never much cared. At least that's what I told myself. But it's a rotten thing for a man to always have the woman walk out on him. As I said, there's been a lot of them, but never one like this dame—Dunlop's girl—crossing the cobblestones toward us like she'd been ducking trucks and forklifts all her life.

"Your girl?" I asked, turning to Dunlop, my voice strangely hoarse. I didn't have to ask; I knew.

He nodded, a dazed look on his face. He was staring at her like I was, only maybe different. To me, she was high society, with the horsey set's standard equipment. High cheekbones with deep hollows beneath; wide set eyes with more shadowed hollows beneath; a mouth painted on by a famous artist; and that arrogant stride they all have that makes clucks like me get out of their way. This walk of hers showed she was no lean strip of bacon like the suit she wore tried to make out. I've got a habit of sort of undressing a girl with my eyes, but with her it didn't work. I don't know why I couldn't make it work with her. I knew she had the goods underneath those expensive clothes.

I saw her face kind of light up at sight of Dunlop. She was so beautiful, half-running toward us

the way she was, that I found myself jumping to attention like one of those tin soldiers at West Point. The way her face changed when she saw me standing beside Dunlop was like being hit with a falling boom. It was only a split-second change, that look that came over her face, but I saw it and it registered. I told myself that it was disappointment, that look, disappointment that Dunlop wasn't alone, and that she would have to hedge her greeting. But I'd seen that expression on a woman's face before. I knew what it meant. In a glance she'd seen in me someone who didn't belong. Why kid myself? Either I lacked something they demanded in a man, or had something they didn't like. They could sense it right away, all of them.

When they came together, Dunlop and her, I turned away and walked off a step or two. I watched them, though. I found myself pretending to say the same things to her Dunlop did, as if she were my girl, not his. When he kissed her, I don't mean I could feel the kiss, but my nerves jumped just the same. The whole thing was crazy. I didn't even hate Dunlop for kissing her, for holding her in his arms, even though I found myself aching to do the same thing. I guess maybe at that moment I was even a little grateful to him for giving me the chance to get so close to a girl like her. When he

introduced me, and explained why I was there, and that I had been a friend of his kid brother, I don't know what I said in return. I do remember every word she said, though. It wasn't much, but I'll never forget it.

"It's very nice to meet you," she said, smiling like she meant it. That's all she said to me right then, but in my moment of madness it meant a lot to me. If I hadn't seen that flicker of instant dislike a moment ago, I'd have thought she meant what she said. 'That's the way these bluebloods are,' I thought. 'They can talk to a two-headed man like he was normal.' I used to say they were all phonies. With her it didn't seem to matter.

I must have said 'yes' when they asked me to have a drink with them at the St. Francis Hotel. If I'd been in my right mind I'd have said no rather than find myself the champion of all third wheels. If I hadn't been really smashed out of shape by the sight and sound of Dunlop's girl, I'd have said 'so long' after one drink. Anyway, the next thing I knew we were climbing out of that big, sleek boat of a car, and I was shuffling my feet across the lobby of the hotel. I was blinded by so much class and can't to this day remember what the place looked like. I stumbled in and out of an elevator behind them, and then almost tripped on the nap of a carpet which covered the floor of a cocktail lounge which made me blink.

It was the sort of place where you expect to see Cary Grant or Liz Taylor or some other smoothy looking up at you from a table. All the people there looked like that, except me. I could feel everyone staring at me like they wondered who'd let the bars down.

We sat down, and while she and Dunlop chatted I studied her more carefully than I'd ever studied anything in my life before. With my eyes I tried to drain some of her qualities into me. I pressed every feature of her into my brain, where it never faded, even at the last. I watched her mouth, the way her lips moved and changed shape while she talked or smiled; and then I'd watch for the flash of the even white teeth beneath or the glimpse of a pink tongue-tip; next it would be her eyes and the way they sparkled and darted from side to side as if she couldn't get enough of seeing Dunlop head-on. And I saw the change come into those eyes, too, before I sensed beneath their light talk that they were quarrelling. I knew without listening what it was all about. She wanted him to give up his mad plans, get off this ship we were on, and come home to her and his family. It was a familiar old story to me. But it was then that I sensed that there was a shift of interest to me. I wasn't dumb enough to misunderstand. She was angry and woman-like turned to the nearest man to demonstrate her anger. But it

didn't make any difference to me. I basked in her pretended interest, ignoring Dunlop's glares. I knew I should have left that table; left them alone. Instead, for the next two hours as we sat in the St. Francis, I made myself drunk with looking at her, with absorbing her into my veins and pumping her through my heart. When she rose to leave, she faced Dunlop with a cold look. He stood looking down at her with a stubborn expression on his face.

"I'm so sorry I must go," she said, turning to me with that warm smile she had. My heart trembled under its impact. Without another glance at Dunlop, she turned and walked away. We both watched her go. I don't know how he felt, but me—something in me seemed to stretch out after her like an elastic band, and break with a 'snap' you could almost hear when she passed out of sight into the waiting elevator.

We sailed the next day for Yokohama. The weather turned foul as soon as the ship's bow nosed under the Golden Gate Bridge. The ship began to pitch and roll and the crew to curse and groan, especially the steward's department. The building tension between Dunlop and Stemweather's clique became as unpleasant as the weather. Dunlop made no bones about it now; he was openly asking for trouble with them. He allowed doors to slam in their faces; when

hauling on a guy, he'd jab one of them with his elbow; or he might shoulder one of them as he passed in the narrow inside alleyways of the house. I knew, we all did, that he'd gone too far when he spilled a pot of grey paint down Stemweather's back while they were painting the king posts from Bos'n chairs.

The rest of the deck gang stayed clear of the building storm. They were afraid of Stemweather's group, and didn't accept Dunlop as one of them. The old Creole bos'n just shook his head, looking gloomy. There was nothing he could do. He could find no fault with Dunlop's work, which he performed with a kind of mechanical perfection rather than with the easy motions of the experienced seaman. I had a feeling, a very uneasy one, that this day, October 19th, was to be the showdown. I'd seen it happen before, and the signs were the same. At every chance Stemweather and his two ever-present shadows gathered together, muttering and glaring at Dunlop's unconcerned back. They tried to rope me into their circle again, but I sheared off. After that I didn't care much for the way their mean eyes began to fix on me, either.

'Ah nuts!' I'd say to myself, in an effort to head off my uneasiness. Then I'd start picturing what might happen when I told Dunlop's girl what happened to him; how she might react if I made my-

self out a sort of hero who'd tried to help him, and failed. Impossible as these dreams were, and with my knowing it, I kept on with them.

This evening I came off watch certain the human explosion would take place. It had to, all the fuses were burned down to the nub. My guess was Stem's gang would go for Dunlop tonight, while he slept. I'd seen it happen like that before. The best way for me to keep clear of the whole mess was to go out on deck and stay there until it was over.

I went down to the messhall for a cup of coffee, climbed the ladder back up to the main deck, carrying my heavy mug, and headed for the stern. I thought I'd be alone back there, but when I rounded the custom shack, I heard the sound of soft music. Dunlop, clad in a pair of khaki shorts, for the weather had now turned warm, sat perched on a neatly flaked mooring line, a small transistor radio in one hand. Light from two wall brackets highlighted the smooth bunching of muscles on his big frame. He appeared not to see me. I couldn't very well walk away, so I sat on a bit, trying to gulp my coffee fast so I could leave on the excuse of getting another. It was lousy coffee, too.

"Nice night," I commented without enthusiasm. I felt I had to say something. The silence was brittle, almost as if a sudden noise might shatter it.

He didn't answer, and I cursed in silent embarrassment for speaking. Then I saw that he was listening to some sound, or sounds, other than the music. A shadow stirred in the darkness under the wings of the docking bridge. They came at him.

Nova came in first, a grin on his brute face. His close-cropped head was hunched between his shoulders. He swung a marlin spike in one hand like a club, holding it by the pointed tip. Reversed, it became a vicious dagger. Piggia came next, Stemweather shoving him from behind. He held a whiskey bottle by the neck, shoulder high. Stemweather moved into the light, big fists out in front. He turned his glittering cockeyes on me.

"You dealt yourself out, it looks, Sam," he growled at me. "You'd best stay out, hear?"

I nodded, my throat dry. Dunlop threw me a contemptuous look from where he now stood. Nova used his fractional inattention to spring forward, swinging the marlin spike at his head. It seemed impossible that he could miss, but he did. Nova staggered back, howling, as the transistor radio shattered against his face. Piggia fell back with a squeal. Stemweather grabbed the bottle from his hand with a curse. The bloody-faced Nova came in again, the spike reversed in his hand. Dunlop threw a straight punch at him, the back

of his fist up, with the knuckles of the first finger joints extended. The terrible blow caught Nova just under his blunt nose. There was a scream, a crunching sound, and a gout of blood. I think we all knew Nova was dead before he fell face forward to the deck. Piggliia screeched again in mortal fear, tumbling to the deck as Stemweather thrust him aside with an oath.

"Got you, by God," roared Stemweather, swinging the bottle at Dunlop's head. Dunlop ducked with incredible speed. The bottle shattered on a steel bracket which held an overhead storage space. Before Dunlop could recover, Stemweather, grunting with the effort, thrust the broken shard of bottle deep into his side. Stemweather, face twisted in a triumphant grimace, started a disemboweling slash down and then across Dunlop's stomach. Dunlop grabbed his thick wrist and twisted. Stemweather's hand slipped from the neck of the shattered bottle which remained embedded in the other man's side, blood pouring from its spout. At the same moment both men shifted their grasp to lock their hands about the other's neck. They stood facing each other, locked close together, glaring into each other's eyes, each attempting to throttle the other. With their loud breathing stopped, the silence accompanying the death struggle between them served to intensify the horror of it

all. But the grisly scene had not yet played itself out. A scuffling sound at the feet of the two dying men drew the eyes of the three of us.

The forgotten Piggliia, the fallen marlin spike in his hand, was rising to his feet to prove himself the most dangerous of them all. His piggy eyes darted and probed at the distorted faces of the two men who were slowly killing each other. A thread of saliva hung from a corner of his mouth. I watched him, frozen to my seat on the bits, as his gimlet eyes attempted to figure the probable winner. Like a shark, he would turn and rend the one who first appeared to be mortally hurt.

The eyes of the two struggling men rolled to watch Piggliia and the lifting spike in his hand. Both had bared their teeth, chests heaving for the air which could not pass tight-squeezed larynx's. Their bulging eyes fastened upon the spike in Piggliia's hand as if it hypnotized them.

Dunlop suddenly appeared to gain strength from some unknown source. He arched his back and his great corded arms began to strain upward. Stemweather's big boots began to dance on the steel deck in an odd shuffle, as if he swung from the end of a short rope. Faster and faster his feet danced. His coarse face began to darken and turn blue, and the swollen tip of his tongue to emerge from between

his teeth. Piggia had found his wounded shark. He swung the marlin spike. It crashed against Stemweather's head with a dull thud. And then it seemed like the whole crew was milling about us, shoving and shouting and cursing.

I liked being a celebrity, though I wouldn't depart this now half-completed trial smelling like a rose. The district attorney's pretended astonishment at my sitting idly by, during the death struggle, as I claimed had seen to that. Later, I began to emerge something like a hero when the two Filipinos took the stand and testified that they'd seen me trying to hold off the other three, Stemweather and his gang, from the badly beaten kid brother some three years before. That is, I was an almost hero while my court appointed attorney questioned them. But when I took the stand, the district attorney ripped me wide open. "Why didn't you report the murder of the younger Dunlop to the proper authorities?" he thundered at me. The newspaper boys and girls didn't seem to care. They loved me. I was good copy they said.

I felt good, too. Dunlop's girl had given me a quick, warm smile of recognition when she first entered the courtroom. She sat in the row of seats behind me, now that Dunlop had finished testifying, about four seats to my right. I knew she didn't mean anything by the smile, not really, but I went for it

anyway, chain and anchor. My insides trembled every time I stole a look at her.

A breath of strange perfume eddied about my head as they were swearing the shrinking Piggia in on the stand. I snorted when they addressed him as *Mister* Piggia. I caught his darting, button eyes in a meaningful glance before I turned to see who belonged to the red fingernail tapping me on the shoulder. The perfume smelled stronger when I faced a pretty blond reporter in a tight red dress. She was with one of the wire services, I knew, for she'd interviewed me earlier with about twenty other reporters. Her green eyes were sparkling with excitement.

"I think I'm free to offer fifteen hundred dollars for an exclusive," she whispered bringing her soft curls close to my cheek. "How about it, Mr. Hansen?"

I leaned my arm across the back of the long bench until I felt a pleasing softness against my elbow.

"Can't you raise the ante, honey?" I asked, grinning at her.

"Aw, come on, Sam," she pleaded, pouting and widening her big eyes at me. "It'll be a real feather in my cap if you do."

I pretended to fall for her baby doll look, enjoying myself.

"Okay, honey, it's a deal." I felt the tremor of excitement ripple through her breast where it touched my arm. "Come up to my hotel after the trial."

"Oh, thanks Mr. Hansen," she gasped, sounding like a kid waking up at Christmas.

"—but I'm warning you," I added, watching her, "it will take all night."

The light dulled in her green eyes and her face went stiff and cold. "Sure, Sam," she said, her voice metallic. "I—"

She suddenly fell back in her seat with a gasp which was echoed from every mouth in the courtroom. I became conscious of Piggia's thin squeaking voice, gaining in volume as he spoke. A hush fell over the court. I found myself holding my breath. I began to feel sick; rotten sick.

"—and they told me to stand watch near number seven hatch," Piggia was squealing. "I saw them walk back" He paused to cast a frightened look at me "—and then I heard a shout and a—you know—a blow. I was afraid someone might've heard. I ran back—" Again he paused, looking like a frightened slug as he stared at me.

He ran his tongue along his thick lips like they were coated with glue. He hunched up on the witness stand like a fat praying mantis. He looked up at the judge, his insect voice squeaking on. "I ran back to the stern, you know, to tell them to keep it quiet. I . . . I saw young Dunlop getting to his feet, holding his jaw. H . . . Hansen—" He pointed a dramatic finger at me, and his voice sud-

denly screeched through the court like a saw hitting a nail. "—Hansen was standing over him with his fists ready . . . I tried to stop him—" He had tried, the fat slob. "—but he shoved me away and began hitting the Dunlop kid like a crazy man. And then . . ."

Piggia's voice faded for me as my mind filled in the rest. Sure, I'd hit him. How could I ever forget it? I remember every blow, every word, as clearly as if it happened this morning instead of three years ago. I remember saying: "Kid, we don't like card cheats on this ship." And I remember his answer, the words that killed him. It wasn't the words themselves, or the truth in them. All he said was: "The three of you've been cheating me for a month, haven't you?" It was his arrogance, his contempt for me and his smug superiority. He was born with something I'd always wanted, breeding or class or whatever you call it—what Dunlop's girl was loaded with—and here he was rubbing my nose in my own low-born, cut-rate image. A madness assailed me. I hit out at him. I remember hearing a rib snap beneath one pounding fist, feeling a cheekbone give beneath the other. I began to beat at him with both fists like a madman—like Piggia said. The brute faced Nova got caught up in my frenzy. He began to pound the kid from the other side. Maybe that's why

he didn't, couldn't, go down as he was hurled back and forth between our hammering fists like a rubber-legged rag doll. And then the giant Stemweather stepped forward, a dull redness gleaming far back in his off-set eyes, tongue wetting his dry lips. He drew back his huge fist and slammed it full strength into the kid's battered face. The kid's feet flew out from under him. The madness drained out of me as quickly as it had come when I heard his skull shatter against the mooring bits. I knelt beside him, cradling his bloody head in my hands. I glared up at Stemweather. "You shouldn't have hit him so hard, Stem," I said. "He's dead."

Stemweather, Nova and Piggli took a step toward me, eyes wide with shock, and then the two Filipinos ran up to see me cradling the kid's broken body in my arms and shouting at the three big men.

The courtroom was in an uproar. The judge banged his gavel shouting: Order! The reporters thundered out the door like stampeding cattle. I turned to see Dunlop standing, trying to reach me. His lawyer hung on one arm, two burly cops on the other. 'He'll follow me all over the world until he

kills me,' I thought. Maybe I said it aloud, I don't know. I turned back to study the faces of the judge, the district attorney, and the jury. Their faces held a common look of shock and loathing. 'No mercy there,' I thought. 'But still, it's only Piggli's word against mine. I can still beat this rap.'

I turned once more to look at the blond reporter in the tight red dress. She shuddered away from me.

"Brutus," she hissed, whatever that meant.

And then I looked over and saw the expression on the face of Dunlop's girl. She gazed at me with such a concentration of hatred and loathing that I felt something wither within me, like a flower hit by the flame of a blowtorch. Suddenly I didn't care anymore what happened to me. I rose to my feet, shaking my lawyer's hand free from my arm. I started walking toward the witness stand. Piggli scuttled past like a cowardly crab. I seated myself in the big chair. I was a dead man anyway, wasn't I? Dunlop would kill me if I went free. His girl would help him if she had the chance. I might as well let the judge and jury stretch my neck.



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**J**AMES GARTH removed his wrap-around sunglasses and parked them by the drink at his elbow. Earlier the sun had been strong enough to crack the patio tiles, but now it was mid-afternoon; the glare had diminished; the water in the pool looked blue instead of too-bright silver, and he could enjoy the sight of his wife in the water, sleek as a seal and almost as brown.

She disappeared, came to the surface at the pool's edge beyond the tiled walk, and reached out a slim tanned arm. Her hair was several shades lighter than her skin.

"Toss me my swimsuit, honey."

Garth grinned. "Which half?"

"Both."

"Get 'em yourself."

# THE VIRILE IMAGE

BY GERALD PEARCE



*She had said, "I can understand what my husband sees in your wife, Mr. Garth, but I can't understand what she sees in him."*

"What will the neighbors think?"

"If they're watching, they've already seen it all. If they aren't, they don't know what they're missing."

She made a protesting face that became a grin and climbed out, naked as Venus rising from the sea. And that, Garth thought, is what we can't show in the domestic version—we have to cut away to a startled parakeet and then come back for a daring shot of the girl's legs scissoring across the screen. We even have to cheat on the export prints. I ought to get a shot of her just like that, climbing unconcernedly naked out of a sunlit pool and see if—But then he remembered, and cut the thought off.

Her swimsuit was two small wet strips of cotton that lay by the foot of the chaise he was stretched out on. She stooped to pick them up. The corners of her eyes crinkled. "Thank you for the possessive look."

"You're quite welcome."

She flicked the swimsuit at his toes as she went by and started for the house. Garth said casually, "Is that how Tony Trenton looks at you?"

She stopped, turned back to him slowly. She gave him a long cool stare but he could see the flush spreading under her tan. For a second he thought she was going to throw the wet bikini at him. Instead she curled her lip faintly and turned and walked away. Without hurry. Without sudden selfconsciousness.

Lots of poise, he thought, in spite of the blush. Poise and firm flesh and sleek supple lines. Killing her was going to be a crime against beauty.

He picked up his glass, cupped both hands around it to enjoy its pleasant chill, then ran a fingertip around its edge. The finger was long and flat and brown, backed with stiff gray hairs. The hand it belonged to was big and square. A fighter's hand. But fighters grow old. James Garth was fifty-eight.

Fifty-eight, and embarrassingly rich. Fifty-eight, with the short wide heavily-muscled body beginning irreversibly to slacken, the never handsome but always powerful face growing blurred, its outline lost. Fifty-eight, and planning the murder of his lovely young wife.

He recognized with distant irony that he wasn't too well equipped for the job.

The man in the street seemed to think that a big movie producer could do anything he wanted—or get it done for him. Like some gang lord of the Twenties. Boys, my wife of three years has become a liability to my self-esteem, get rid of her. Because of the business he was in, and the sometimes unstable people he had to deal with, Garth had long ago established good contacts on both sides of the law. He had only to pick up his phone to retain a pimp, a pusher, or the most discreetly reliable abortionist in the country. But I don't suppose, he thought

calmly, I'd know how to hire a small boy to throw a stone through the window of an empty house, much less someone to commit murder.

But of course that wasn't the problem, because he had to kill her himself. And she had to realize it. That knowledge, appreciated for a few minutes, or moments, would reveal him to her in a new light. What a pity that he should have to kill her to gain her respect.

"When you're an old slob of fifty-five like Jim Garth, and you marry a twenty-year-old sexpot, you gotta expect to get cheated on," Tony Trenton's voice had said through the louvered window of the men's room in the Administration Building at the studio. He had an unstagily beautiful voice that carried and was instantly recognizable. Without it he would have stayed in the ranks of the TV series pretty-boys instead of making it to the top in wide screen and color, where he was big business. Women loved him. He loved them back with the forthright ardor of a goat in the spring.

"You just felt her up a little," another voice said. There came the squak of a tap and the sound of running water. "You talk like you made it already."

"Gimme a coupla days," Trenton said. "Hell, it's not as though it'd be Carol's first time out . . ."

And it wasn't. The first one had been two years ago. At least she had

told him it was the first. Garth had heard about it at a cocktail party, one of those noisy professionally anxious affairs where only the waiters were calm and only the few really big men, like Garth, could talk without screaming. He had found himself standing next to Myrna Hartley, over-dressed as usual, her long face awkward and tragic, her large yellow eyes strangely empty. Her husband was a set designer with one Oscar to his credit out of three nominations.

She had said, "I can understand what my husband sees in your wife, Mr. Garth, but I can't understand what she sees in him."

Garth smiled. "I'll ask her, and let you know."

But the smile and the pose of tolerant humor had been hard to maintain when she went on, "Because he's really not much good, you know, at that sort of thing," eyeing him over the rim of her glass with large yellow eyes that were at once pitying and disdainful.

Fifty-eight, he thought now, is not fifty-five, just as fifty-five is not thirty. You would think a man could relax into the milder demands of age instead of fighting them, he was just regretting, in an abstract way, the sad fact that came to the forefront of his mind each time he looked at his wife—who enjoyed him, but also, at least on occasion, others too. The fact: that everyone seemed to think that the years that had slowed him down

physically had also unmanned him, making him an object of pity and contempt, a sad old slob lusting with increasing helplessness for young flesh.

That first time—if it was the first time—after the talk with Myrna Hartley at the cocktail party, he had asked Carol as soon as he got her home. She had been contrite and compassionate, which had taken him aback. She had spoken to him of loneliness and boredom, reminding him of the brutal schedule he had held himself to for the preceding six months, and said that when Jack Hartley started in on her she had welcomed him with something akin to desperation. Because he had actually talked to her. He made love with conversation—about the weather, the Dodgers, Hollywood, politics, gossip, anything—so that when one day he slid a hand up under her skirt it seemed like the pleasant and logical development of a rewarding relationship. He had made himself a real person to her, and therefore, in some way, she had become more of a real person to herself. Was she sorry? Only that she had hurt him, she said, and he didn't think she was enough of an actress to have faked that kind of candor, regret, and affection. He had had to admit that he had been neglecting her, that he had never imagined that her conversational range went beyond pop music, movies, and local scandal; and then, in the second year of their marriage,

he began to discover that she was more than young and lovely to look at and an enthusiastic bed partner. She was a person, and he liked her.

Which was why her second infidelity (if it was only the second) threw him into such a deadly fury. The man was a handsome muscular Adonis who played bit parts when he was lucky and spent most of his time at the beach with the other surfing bums and lived on unemployment compensation and what he could sponge. He had found them together in the back seat of her car, parked in their garage, like a couple of kids. The muscle-boy had started to make a blustering speech, had caught a good look at Garth's face and run.

"Who is he?"

"A boy I used to know. Before . . . you know. Before we were married."

Garth said brutally, "Before you got a contract by satisfying the curious appetites of a casting director named Michael McHenry."

"Yes."

"I'm sure you'll have a very good explanation this time too."

"I liked him. I mean I still do. I don't mean I'm in love with him, I just like him, I just wanted to be nice to him."

"Your friends are welcome in our house, our pool, even in the back seat of your car. But there are certain privileges, you silly little bitch, that are reserved exclusively for me. I thought I'd made that clear."

"You knew what I was before you married me. You'd been sleeping with me long enough."

"You are not what you were before I married you. You are Mrs. James Garth."

"Yes, Jim." She looked away. After a while she said slowly, "Do you want me to go away?"

He had said in a different tone, his fury subsiding before a surge of humor as unexpected as it was tolerant, "No, damn it, I want you to behave." And that had been the end of it.

Except of course—it hadn't. It had been the beginning, for James Garth, of an uncomfortable train of thought.

What was a man supposed to do in exchange for a romp in the hay? Pay well. Fine, he paid well, and especially well when it was worth it. But that wasn't enough, was it? Not for the girls who tried the starlet route. They wanted more. A chance to be a star. Stars had been made that way. Or perhaps rent on a pad where, among luxurious gifts showered down by the benefactor, they could entertain younger and more appealing men. Perhaps what Carol got—a husband with more money than her mind could really encompass.

A crook of his finger had been enough to get her away from the casting director, McHenry. After all, Garth was a much bigger wheel, which made him a better investment for her time and energy. He

had proposed to her in a moment of whimsy and five minutes later she had come out of what had looked like shock and said yes and married him two days later, in Vegas. What had she been thinking of? Money? Big cars, a big house? A quick divorce and a fat fortune to play with for the rest of her life? But she had stayed. And cheated. And stayed.

And cheated. How many times, really? He didn't know. Twice admitted, by now presumably a third, most likely somewhere here in his own house; and he would never know if there had been others and what their number was. But twice was enough; the likelihood of the third was acknowledged by her blush and that made it as good as a fact. Because what counted was not how often she lay down for other men but what she thought of him for allowing it, for not preventing it, or perhaps for making it inevitable.

Each time he thought on it his mind went almost blank with stupefaction. How insignificant he must be in her regard if she could so totally ignore his standing in the eyes of everyone involved—his own, hers, and those of her lovers and their endless chains of confidants. That poor old bastard Garth, so hung up on that tramp starlet he married he lets her get away with it right under his own roof. The fact that he could still enjoy her company, and that she could still enjoy him in bed, were irrelevant

because unbroadcast and because both were now becoming suspect to him. Perhaps he enjoyed her company because she was young and pretty and played up to him. And if she could enjoy Myrna Hartley's husband she could probably enjoy anyone, even the unconventional McHenry.

If she had asked for a divorce, he thought, she could have had one without any fuss, taking half he owned plus alimony. Or she could have before the first time. Without argument. After the business with Jack Hartley he would have proved a little harder to deal with but she could still have had her freedom and a substantial settlement without having to get nasty about it. But the afternoon with the over-tanned, over-muscled bit player had moved Garth into a different emotional gear. The affront to his virility had begun to rankle, and he had begun hearing odd words dropped here and there that had not been intended for his ears.

Strange, he thought: here, I am, contemplating a status murder. I am going to kill her because she had reduced me in her mind and in the minds of many of my friends, a larger number of my enemies, and a still larger group consisting of people I neither know nor care to know, to a groveling thing without pride. I have to kill her to show her that I am not. To erase the image from all those other minds I would have to make this a public execu-

tion with consequent danger to myself. This isn't necessary. They'll suspect anyway. So he would let them suspect, according him that much respect at least. And meantime he would be free. Physically free, not having been arrested, tried, and convicted. And most important of all free from the fear of his image in Carol's mind, which he would once and for all have changed in the process of killing her.

Simple, wasn't it?

He smiled faintly, wily, and downed the last of his drink. Now all he needed to do was devise a perfect crime. He did not believe in complicated plots. Something simple. A party, with lots of people to watch her getting high. Then when everyone was gone a fast, efficient "accident" out by the pool. She would be found with a horrible bruise where her head had hit the side in a drunken fall—the precise mechanics shouldn't be too hard to arrange—she would have fallen unconscious into the pool and quietly drowned.

He could draw her onto the patio, put his arms around her to complement her on the party, and then explain that he was going to kill her. Since she had to be a bit high for the stage-setting to accomplish anything for him, the assurance would mean little unless it was reinforced by a carefully built up structure of memories, hints, even promises, which she would suddenly, for a few brief satisfying mo-

ments, realize were now going to be made good.

Perhaps I should start it right now, he thought, getting up off the chaise. I could go in and say, oh, something like, "Carol, darling, has it ever occurred to you that I might get tired enough of your playing around to decide to kill you?"

Just that. Just the question. And then something unrelated, something friendly and indulgent, turning her response aside. He might make love to her.

He stretched, flexed his big flat fighter's hands, and prowled barefoot toward the house with the pleasant awareness of power and wellbeing his muscular body still gave him when it was rested and relaxed. French doors admitted him to the hall with its informal lounging furniture. He turned to the left and found her in the master bedroom. The door to the bathroom was open and there was a hint of steam in the air. She had showered to remove the pool's chlorine from her hair and its odor from her skin. She wore a short terrycloth robe and was toweling her head briskly.

He watched indulgently. She dropped the towel into a laundry hamper, pushed her pale hair back off her face and sat down in front of her dressing table, facing him. Her face was composed and grave. He opened his mouth to speak but she was a beat ahead of him.

"I'm sorry, Jimmy. I want a divorce."

He was briefly appalled at the way the words took the play away from him. He adjusted without effort, made a non-committal gesture with one hand. This turn might make killing her unnecessary. He would have to think it over.

"I often wonder why you married me," he said after a moment.

"I liked you. You were very sophisticated and accomplished. I thought you were very exciting. I thought that living with you as your wife would be exciting. I was a greedy little bitch and I thought it would be lovely to have money and a lovely house with a pool and clothes and everything. It made me feel very proud to have someone like you offer them to me."

"Did you think it would last?"

"I didn't think about it. Oh, in the back of my head I heard this voice saying Look kid, if you don't like it, you can always quit. You know? Nobody gets married these days without that. But still I really didn't think. There was just you and me living in this house and it was all sort of *now*. There wasn't any future. That *was* the future, it had arrived."

"That was a silly notion, Carol."

"I guess it was. I've . . . well, grown up in three years. I'm terribly sorry for the things I've done wrong. It's very strange—I don't know quite how to put this—but I don't think I made a mistake marrying you, just that it would be a mistake to go on."

"I see. His smile took on an ironic twist.

"No matter what I do—or don't do—you'll never trust me again. We can't live like that."

"Maybe not. I suppose you've made out a nice long list of the things you'll want? This house? Fifty thousand a year? Maybe a—"

"Nothing."

"—nice big Rolls Royce, with a Mercedes to keep it company."

"No nothing. I don't want anything."

He said after a long moment, "What?"

"I'm sorry. Truly. I don't want anything. It wouldn't be fair. I just want out."

"Out? He said it again, in mounting incredulity and a sudden cold clutch of fear. "Out?"

She looked down at her hands, saw that her robe had fallen open and tugged it closed in an automatic gesture. Garth remembered his passing thought of love but now it was only an academic fact, a datum of memory. He was vulnerable—

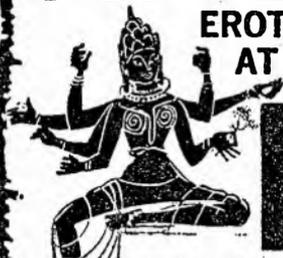
suddenly so vulnerable he had no choice, no time for subterfuge, no time for anything but self-preservation.

His right fist caught her on the temple. She fell half stunned to the floor and then for a while pummeled and gouged and scratched ineffectively while his hands around her slim brown neck did what they had to do. How easy it was, really—taking a life. He wondered if she knew why it was happening to her. Probably not. He had never fully realized—not until now—the degree to which he and Carol had been unable to communicate. It was unfortunate that he had to forego the element of comprehension but he could not afford luxuries now—not even the luxury of avoiding the inevitable murder charge. All that mattered now was that no one else would ever hear the voice that Garth could hear in the privacy of his own skull. The voice of Tony Trenton, summarizing Garth's decline. "She wants out so bad, the poor kid isn't asking for a cent."



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**T**HINGS have been real nice since I got out of the Fights. Retired, Janie calls it. Just like I'd been a big business man or something. That's one thing I like about Janie, her sense of humor. Lots of guys might think she was too quiet. Not me. I like Janie. She's a swell wife. It was her idea we come way up here to Maine and buy this place, miles

from nowhere, where we don't even get mail or see anybody maybe weeks on end, and I go the thirty miles into town for supplies about once a month. It's kind of primitive, no electricity, no phone, getting water from a well and all. But it's fun. It's nice.

We don't get lonesome. Except right after Mr. Calligy was here.

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*A*  
*MANHUNT CLASSIC*

**BY**  
**ROBERT TURNER**

*Rocky maybe was a little punchy. But he was strong. And between him and Janie . . . they could take care of themselves.*

# THE FIXER

That was a funny one, him coming here. I never did really find out why he came. Of course he gave me a silly reason, kidding around the way Mr. Calligy and all those guys from the rackets do. You never hardly get a straight answer out of guys like him. I remember the first thing I said, when he drove up and stepped out of that big car of his:

"Well, Mr. Calligy," I said. "What are you doing here?"

"What do you say, Rocky?" he answered. "I'm hidin' from the cops. No kiddin', Rocky, what do you think of that? I'm wanted for murder, for killing that big schnook of a manager of yours, Leo Mace. Remember Leo? Well, say a prayer for him, Rocky. He's dead. I knocked him off."

I looked at him. He didn't look so good. His expensive suit was all rumpled and he needed a shave. Those heavy-hooded eyes of his were all bloodshot and tired, too. I said: "You kiddin', Mr. Calligy?" As soon as I asked, I knew it was a foolish question. Guys like Mr. Calligy, in the rackets, don't go around knocking people off. They're like business men, not like the old gangster movies. Mr. Calligy maybe mixes in the numbers business, fixes a few fights like that last one of mine. But none of this strong-arm stuff.

"I wouldn't kid you, Rocky," Mr. Calligy said. "I——"

He stopped cold, looking past me. I turned and saw that Janie had come out of the house. She was

wearing shorts and a halter and she looked nice. I was real proud of Janie. Her legs were long and curved real pretty, like a chorus girl's legs and they were smoothly tanned. And that halter—well, Janie would have looked good in a burlap bag, but that halter was the end. The real end. And with her reddish hair pulled tight over her forehead and balled up in the back, with the sun shining on it like on liquid copper, Janie looked beautiful that moment. Mr. Calligy thought so, too. He said:

"Well, maybe this country life can be real invigorating, after all." He made a whistling sound. "Who's that, Rock?"

"Janie," I called. "Come meet Mr. Calligy."

She walked toward us. Her eyes never left Mr. Calligy's and her lips looked a little pursed, as though she was frightened or maybe sore about something. I couldn't figure that out. I heard her say: "I've already met Mr. Calligy, long, long ago."

"Why, sure," he said. "I remember you now, Baby. You're the little chick with the mousy look and the big horn rimmed glasses used to work for Farnsworth, the promoter."

"She just wears glasses when she reads or types or close work like that," I explained.

"Sure," Mr. Calligy said. "With or without glasses, she can do some close work for me, anytime. How

about that, Janie? Like to put your glasses on and do a little close work for me some time?"

I laughed. He's a great kidder, that Mr. Calligy. All these bigshot racket guys are. But Janie was a little white around the lips. She didn't seem to get it. She said:

"How did you find us? Nobody's supposed to know where we are. Only Leo Mace knew and he wouldn't have told anybody—especially you."

"You got it figured," he told her. "Mace let me in on the little secret. Just before he died. I sort of sweated it out of him. And you know what I was going to do when I got here, honey? I was going to shoot some holes in a punching bag. You know what I mean?"

I didn't. What was he talking about? Since I quit the Fights, I don't do any training. We ain't got any punching bags, no gloves or nothing, up here in the country.

Janie said: "You can't do that. He doesn't know. He doesn't remember what happened. You can't blame him. Please!"

Now I didn't understand Janie, either. It was like they were talking double talk and it was setting amy head aching. It does that sometimes, since that last fight with Barney Phelan, when I took a dive like Mr. Calligy paid me to, especially. Sometimes I don't seem to see too good, either. Sometimes I don't even hear right and yet at the same time I sometimes hear sounds and noises

that ain't even real, Janie says. I guess she was right and I was in the Fights too long. But it paid off. Janie and I got enough money to live on, way out here in the country, the rest of our lives.

"Don't worry, kid," Mr. Calligy said to Janie. He was looking her over and over and I felt kind of proud that a bigshot like Mr. Calligy admired my wife so much. He rubbed his hands together. "Since I got here, I got other plans. Much better plans."

He looked at me. "You got a car?"

"No," I told him. "A jeep. I can drive it, too."

Mr. Calligy winced and looked at Janie. He said: "How do you stand it? What do you do, day in, day out, sit around here, listening to the sound of the bells in his crazy cranium? Hell, honey, I'll bet you're glad to see a human being, huh?"

You see what an education this Mr. Calligy had, the words he used. I laughed as though I knew what he was talking about. Janie said: "Lay off of that. Leave him alone, you hear?"

Her eyes got blazing mad. I was surprised. I said: "Aw, Janie, Mr. Calligy was just kiddin' around."

"So you got a jeep," he said. "Then when I get ready to go, I can get into town with that. Swell. I'll be back in a minute. Got to get rid of the car, just in case anyone does come snooping around, looking for me. I passed a nice deep-looking

creek, up the road about half a mile. You follow me in the jeep, Rocky.”

I watched him get back into the Caddy. I looked at Janie. “What’s he doing?” I saw Mr. Calligy drive off, back the way he had come, down the narrow, rutted dirt road that led out to the main highway. ten miles back.

Janie came over and threw herself into my arms. She put her head against my chest. Her fingers dug into my arm muscles. “Rocky, I’m scared,” she said. She was, too. I could tell by her voice. “What are we going to do? We’ve got to *do* something. He’ll kill you, too. Maybe not right away, but after a while.”

I grinned. I liked to have her cuddle up to me like this. She was so small and soft and warm against me. “Mr. Calligy kill me?” I said. “That’s silly. Why would he want to do that?”

She leaned back away from me, turned her face up toward me. I’d never seen her eyes so full and pretty, the long lashes all stuck together. “Listen, Rocky. I’ve got to tell you something, try to make you understand. Think hard, darling. Try to understand this.”

I frowned and looked down at her and concentrated. My head hurt but I kept it up because Janie wanted me to. She said, slowly, spacing the words: “That last fight, with Barney Phelan, remember? You got orders to take a dive. In the sixth round. But you were to let him hit you, make it look good, maybe even

knock you out for real, because you were the heavy favorite and it had to look good. Remember?”

“Yeah, yeah,” I said.

“And in the sixth, you gave him some openings just like you were supposed to. And he really teed off on you. You went down, twice, remember?”

“Sure. The second time, I stayed down. I was really out, cold. He—he hit me too hard. I didn’t remember nothing for three days after the fight and then I was up here with you and I don’t remember how we even got here.”

“That’s right, Rocky,” she said. She nodded her head, approvingly. “Now, try to understand this. I never told you. I didn’t want to worry you. Something went wrong in that sixth round after you went down the second time. You got up again, looking kind of dizzy. Phelan came at you, but he was careless, wide open. You threw a wild, heavy punch. It caught him flush and he went down. He stayed down. *You won that fight, Rocky, and you shouldn’t have.* Calligy lost fifty thousand dollars. He didn’t understand, either. He thought it was a double-cross you and Leo Mace pulled on him. Do you understand, Rocky? That’s why he’s up here. He’s killed Leo and he’ll kill you, too.”

I stared down at her and my eyes went blurry and I couldn’t see her for a moment. There was a sound like millions of grasshoppers in my

ears. My head began to hurt worse and worse, so bad I could hardly stand it. Then it stopped and I said: "You're kidding me, Janie. For some reason. That *couldn't* have happened. How could it?"

She seemed to go crazy and tried to shake me, like she would a little kid. But when you're a hundred eighty pounds, a little dame like Janie has trouble shaking you. Then Mr. Calligy backed up to our driveway in his Caddy, called out the window: "What the hell are you waitin' for, bellhead? You expect me to walk all the way back from that creek?"

"He's got some crazy idea," I told Janie. "I'd better go with him."

She just stood there and watched me go, as I got into the jeep and went after Mr. Calligy in his Caddy. I kept thinking about what Janie had said. It didn't make sense. Why would I double-cross Mr. Calligy? I'd been in the business too long to think I could get away with something like that. And I'd have remembered. Unless Phelan *had* knocked me cold that second time I went down, I would have remembered, wouldn't I? Janie was a little mixed up, upset about something.

When we got to the creek, I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw Mr. Calligy drive the car off the little wooden bridge and into the creek, where it quickly sunk out of sight. I shook my head. I didn't know. Everybody seemed to be acting crazy, today. I said: "What did you do

that for? A nice car like that?"

"Rocky, m'boy," he said. "I can always get another car. This way, if any cops *do* come, you can hide me and there won't be any car to give things away."

He got into the jeep with me and we drove back to our place. "You mean you really are in trouble with the cops, Mr. Calligy?"

"Ha-ha," he said. "Joke."

Then I asked him about that fight with Phelan. I told him what Janie had told me. I wasn't afraid of him. When I finished, he pulled way over onto the other side of the seat and looked at me from under those hooded lids of his and twisted his thin, pink little mouth all up, as though he was trying to figure something out. "I'll be damned," he said, finally. "Leo Mace wasn't giving me any bull, then. Because you couldn't have been acting, just now. It was too perfect. I'm really beginning to think it happened like Leo said and you really didn't know what you were doing?"

"What do you mean what I was doing?"

"Skip it," he said. "We'll see. In the next few days I'll be able to tell for sure."

It was kind of nice having Mr. Calligy there for company. We hadn't had any before. That night at the supper table there was a lot of funny talk, though. Like I said, Mr. Calligy was a great kidder. You know what he kept saying? He'd say:

"Rock, old brain, what would you do if your wife ever told you some other guy tried to make her? You know, that he was fooling around with her. What would you do?"

He caught me by surprise. I had to think for a minute. I thought about Janie, and some other guy bothering her, putting his hands on her, trying to kiss her and stuff like that. Seeing that picture in my head made me a little crazy. I slammed the table with my fist so hard I broke a dish. "I'd kill him," I said. My eyes got blurry and I could almost feel myself punching this guy who'd tried to make my wife, like Mr. Calligy said, punching him until he was dead.

"You see, Janie," Mr. Calligy said. "But, Rocky, they'd electrocute you for that. That would be murder."

"I wouldn't care," I said. "I wouldn't be able to help myself. I love Janie. Nobody was ever so good to me. She's the only girl never wanted me to spend my money, who's never kidded me about bein' punchy and ugly. I'd have to kill anybody who bothered Janie, no matter what happened."

"You see, Janie," Mr. Calligy said. "He *isn't* kidding. He'd do that. And surer'n hell they'd electrocute him. No more Rocky. Remember that!"

Then he'd say to me: "This is nice up here, Rocky keed. Up here in the wilds, with a beautiful dame. Do you ever go anywhere, Rocky? I mean do you ever go into town or

take any trips, leave this dump at all?"

"No, he doesn't," Janie butted in before I could answer. "When he does, I go with him."

I looked at her, wondering what she said that for. "No, you don't, Janie," I said. "You never go with me. I always go alone. You told me, even, you don't mind being here alone, that there's nothing to be afraid of, way out here."

Mr. Calligy roared with laughter. I thought he'd never stop. Soon I began to laugh with him. I knew I must've said something funny. Janie got up from the table and went out into the kitchen. When Mr. Calligy was through laughing, he hollered out there after her: "Hey, Janie, is that true you aren't afraid of anything here, without Rocky around? The wolves don't bother you or anything?"

I wanted to tell Mr. Calligy we didn't have any wolves around here, only foxes once in a while and sometimes a skunk or two, but I didn't get the chance. He was laughing too hard again.

So Mr. Calligy stayed with us a couple days and he began to look different than when he came. He got some rest and his eyes cleared and he got some color in his face. He had a lot of expensive sport clothes out of the suitcase he'd taken from the big car. He was real sharp, a good-looking guy and I could see why he was a bigshot in the Rackets. He was real nice to

me, too. I liked Mr. Calligy. Even Janie seemed to take to him a little more after a couple of days. Sometimes when I was out chopping wood or drawing water from the well and would come in again, I'd find them talking together, real quiet. Every once in awhile I'd catch her looking at Mr. Calligy with a funny look, too. I could tell she was thinking how it was funny an ex-pug like me would have big-shot friends, handsome and polished like Mr. Calligy.

He was an interesting talker, too. He was always telling us about trips he was going to take when he left here. He'd say: "I may go to Mexico. It's beautiful there, this time of year. With the kind of dough I got stashed away, I could live like a king down there. A big mansion, plenty of servants and a cute little chick to keep me company. She'd have the best of everything, plenty of clothes, a car of her own, never have to do a lick of work. Every night we'd tour the night clubs in Mexico City. Days we'd loll around the beaches, or take in some of that deep sea fishing. Boy, that's the life."

Or else maybe he'd talk about taking a boat trip around the world, or about Monte Carlo, where all the rich people hand out in Europe, on that there, now, Riviera place, or Rio De Janeiro. And always about all the money he'd spend and the little doll who'd be with him, how she'd enjoy all that, too. Whoever his girl was, she was sure lucky.

Of course, when he'd talk like this, Mr. Calligy hardly looked at me. He sort of just talked to Janie. I guess maybe he thought I wouldn't understand, wouldn't know anything about those places, but, hell, I studied Geography when I was a kid. Most of the time, though, Janie didn't hardly seem to be listening to him. She'd just stare down at her plate. One time, she was listening, though. Mr. Calligy must've said something that reminded her of something sad because her eyes brimmed up. She said:

"Will you stop it, stop it!" And she jumped up from the table and ran out into the kitchen.

Toward the end of the week, Mr. Calligy became a bit of a pest. He was always after me to go into town for him. He was out of cigarettes or he wanted some magazines, or something. But Janie wouldn't let me go. She said it wasn't time for my regular trip, yet. The funny thing was that later Mr. Calligy would find that he had some cigarettes, didn't need any after all, or whatever it was. I guess he was just bored.

I got a little worried about Janie toward the end of that week, though. She got a little snappish and she looked flushed all the time and at nights she wasn't like a wife should be, at all. I thought maybe she was working too hard trying to make things right for our guest, cooking too much and always cleaning up, scrubbing the floor and washing the

windows and all. When I asked her about it, she didn't even answer me. That wasn't like Janie.

Sometimes, too, toward the end of the week, I'd wake up nights and find Janie wasn't there. I'd go out and find her on the front porch or out on the back stoop, looking up at the stars. She'd look real pretty with the moonlight shining on her and her nightgown so thin and all it was like only a mist was covering her. Janie looked swell in a nightgown. But she'd jump when I'd speak to her. When I'd ask her what was the matter, she'd say, quickly:

"Nothing, nothing, Rock, dear. I—I just couldn't sleep, that's all. I thought maybe a little fresh air would help."

Then we'd both be quiet and we'd hear Mr. Calligy snoring, inside, in the guest room. Suddenly Janie would whisper, real fiercely: "When is he going to go? You got to get him out of here, Rocky, before something terrible happens! I don't like him. I can't stand him. I'm afraid of him. Get him to go, please, Rocky."

"Aw, now, Janie," I'd say and take her into my arms and comfort her. "If that's the way you feel about it, I'll speak to him, tomorrow. But you're being silly. Mr. Calligy's a nice guy. What's there to be afraid of? But I'll speak to him."

I did, several times. Mr. Calligy, he only laughed and acted like he thought I was kidding.

Then, the last night of that week,

I had this nightmare. It was really bad. It seemed that I woke up and found that Janie wasn't in bed with me again. But I was getting used to that. I started to go back to sleep again. Then I heard a sort of muffled screaming sound from the front porch. I went out there and there was Janie with some guy, I couldn't see who it was, it was so dark and all. The guy had his arms around Janie and was fighting with her and her nightgown was half torn off, and her white skin shining in the dark. I ran toward them and then in the dark and confusion and all, the guy swung his elbow up and around and it caught me flush on the point of the chin. It hurt like crazy for a second and everything in me seemed to burst into fireworks and then something like a blackout came. That was the funny part about this nightmare. It must have ended right in the middle like that. You know how they do. Because I don't remember any more of it. But for the few minutes that wild dream was going on, it was terrible. Just like it was really happening.

I must have slept late the next morning. It was way after sunup when I got up and washed and dressed and went out to the kitchen, where Janie was moving around and I could smell bacon frying and coffee boiling. I went out and kissed her, like always. She turned toward me and stared at me. A funny kind of look. Almost as though she was scared. Then it faded.

I said: "You didn't sleep very well last night, either, huh?"

She must have been holding her breath because she let it all out at once. "It's all right, Rocky, then, I guess."

"What is?" I said. "Hey, about the nightmare I had last—"

She threw herself into my arms. "I know, Rocky, I know," she said. "Please forget about it. Please."

I guess I must have been pretty bad, probably groaning and thrashing around and all and that was how she knew about it.

Then while she was holding onto me real tight like that, she murmured something about I shouldn't ever get angry, I shouldn't ever lose my temper over anything. Not anything. I just laughed and told her: "Me? Why should I get mad at anybody?"

When Janie was all right again and moved away from me, I sat down to breakfast. We were halfway through breakfast before I realized that there was something wrong. Mr. Calligy wasn't there. He never missed breakfast. I said: "Where's Mr. Calligy?"

She kept right on eating, without looking up. She said after a moment, "He left early this morning, before you got up. He's gone."

"Gone?" I gasped. "What a crazy

guy! He didn't even say good-bye to me. He—" I stopped, remembering something. "Hey, how could he? Without a car or anything?"

"I—I took him in, in the jeep."

"Oh," I said. "You should have waked me, Janie." I was a little sore about it. "You don't drive that jeep very good, like I do."

"Rocky!" She cut me off. She stared across the table at me, her eyes kind of stern and yet soft. She said very slowly: "Rocky, we're not ever going to discuss Mr. Calligy again. Never, Rocky. That's all."

I didn't get it but I humored her.

It was a little lonesome around there with Mr. Calligy gone. But I got over missing him. A few days after Mr. Calligy left, our well began to stink something awful. Janie told me a skunk fell into it. But when I wanted to climb down and get it out of there, she said, no, she'd never drink that water again, even if we drained the well. She made me dig a new one and fill the old one in. It's a long hard job, digging a well. I cursed that skunk out plenty while I was doing it.

That was almost five years ago. We never heard from Mr. Calligy again. The way he was so fond of me and Janie, I often thought he might come back. He never did, though.



# PORTRAIT IN BLOOD



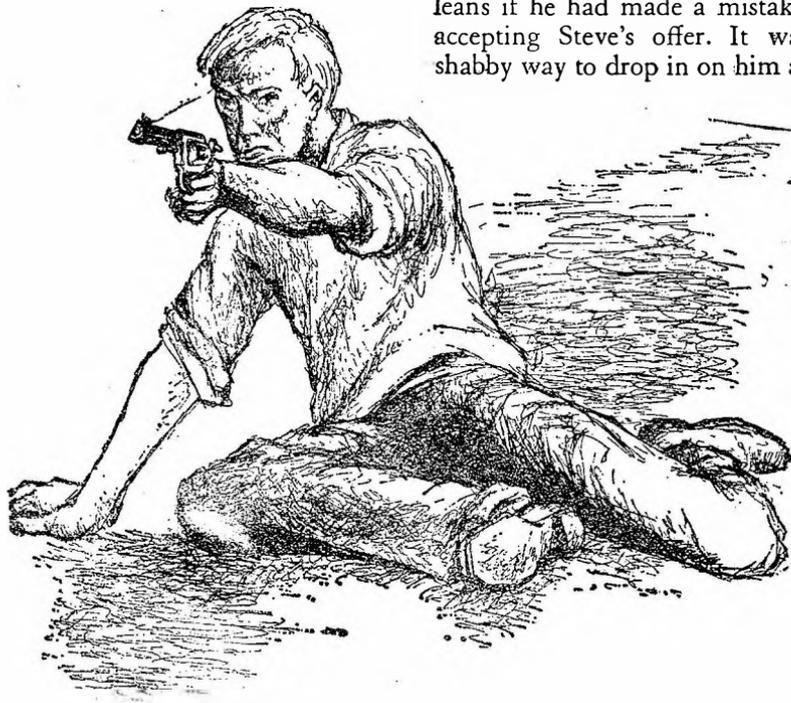
*"Merrill, I believe I may have to take a chance with you . . . you might be McMann's last hope."*

*A NOVELETTE*

BY  
**BOB TEMMEY**

WITH a final jerk the Capitol Limited ground to a shuddering halt. Two minutes later the exit companionways were open and a hodgepodge of Christmas travelers, overloaded with suitcases and gayly wrapped packages, hurried along the boarding ramp toward Union Station, their breaths white vapor darts.

Buddy Merrill watched them sourly from his stool at the club car bar until the last passed the coach windows, wondered for the dozenth time since leaving New Orleans if he had made a mistake in accepting Steve's offer. It was a shabby way to drop in on him after



three years—almost broke, and not even a gift. It was the gift that was bothering him most. After all Steve had done for him he should have

...

"Another gin and tonic, sir?"

"Wha—" He looked up quickly and found the Negro bartender, teeth chalk white and glistening, smiling at him. His eyes automatically swept the club car, found it empty except for the two of them. "No; I guess not."

He downed the remainder of his drink quickly and stood: a tall, rangy young man with untidy black hair, a pair of deep-set brown eyes and a cleft chin. He was wearing a bulky maroon boatneck sweater, dark slacks and light colored moccasins that had seen more than their share of use. The clothing along with the freckles on his nose and full cheeks made him appear younger than his 27 years. Avoiding the bartender's dark eyes he reached awkwardly in his pants pocket, laid the last of his change by his empty glass.

"Thank you, sir . . . and Merry Christmas."

Buddy walked slowly back through the empty coaches recalling, for some unexplainable reason, the first time he had seen Steve. He was in high school, 15, and Steve was waiting for him outside the principal's office: a broad-shouldered, bull-necked smiling Irishman, neat in his Marine uniform. There were seven colorful ribbons

over his left-hand breast pocket. He remembered trying to pick out the one that represented the Silver Star—The one Steve had received trying to save Brad's life.

"*You're Buddy Merrih,*" he had said, and held out a hairy-backed, hamlike hand. "*I'd know you anywhere . . . Same stubborn chin.*" Then he had smiled warmly. "*Buddy, I'm Steve McMann . . . I was with your brother when he died.*"

That had been in 1952, shortly after the armistice in Korea. And from that day Steve had been like his own brother; later father and mother when his parents were killed in an automobile crash just after he turned 17. The money that had got him through art school, the periodic checks to tide him over through the lean years had all come from Steve—*And now he was coming to him with no Christmas present.*

He pushed his coach door open and dejectedly headed along the aisle, so occupied with the past that he didn't notice the square-shouldered man in the tan trenchcoat—the man with the flat blonde crew-cut and the tracery of scars on his nose bridge—watching him from the seat where he had left his gear.

"I was beginning to think you fell out somewhere in North Carolina, kid."

"Steve!"

"In the flesh. I waited at the gate: when you didn't show I decided to see if maybe you got locked in the

John. Then I found this crap." He motioned to the scuffed suitcase, folded tripod and a two by three-foot sketching pad. "I figured if I just took it easy you'd come to me." His rugged Irish features seemed to explode into a grin as he pushed himself up from the coach seat. "Great to see you, kid. It's been a long time."

For a moment Buddy couldn't find any words. He grasped the outstretched hand and held it tightly, his eyes locked with Steve's. He couldn't help thinking that Steve McMann looked like the typical storybook private investigator. Finally he said, "Too long . . . I'm glad I came now."

"Now?"

"I mean . . ."

"What is it, kid? You got problems?"

Buddy couldn't look at the probing eyes.

"You're broke! That's it! You were ashamed to come without cash!"

Buddy shrugged and looked up sheepishly. "I couldn't even buy a present."

"Jesus Christ!" For a long moment Steve McMann just stared; then he began laughing, a deep, bull-throated sound that filled the coach. "Come on; let's get out of here before I start crying."

Then Buddy found himself laughing, too. He'd been a fool: he should have known Steve couldn't care less about a Christmas present

—It was good to be close to him again.

They jostled their way through the crowded station, Steve carrying the tripod and sketching pad, Buddy the suitcase.

"Expect you to get a lot of work done here, kid. I'm counting on you staying at least a month. You're not going to like the weather . . . pretty wet, but it should serve a purpose . . . Keep you inside with a brush in your hand."

"It was raining when I left New Orleans. I'm used to it."

They pushed out the main door into the damp December evening chill and headed past a long line of taxicabs toward the passenger parking area. Overhead the sky was a dark slate gray, and as they walked the street lights of Massachusetts Avenue went on. Christmas decorations glistened.

"And don't worry about putting me out. I figure a painting or two will cover your end of it. Anyway, I've got a few cracks to cover."

Buddy glanced at him, found him grinning. He realized then that he had needed Steve. He had needed a crutch to support him while he licked his wounds and tried to convince himself he wasn't a failure. He needed to be near someone close while he decided what he was going to do with his life— He was still thinking about himself when a gruff voice behind snapped him out of it.

"McMann!"

Buddy jerked around sharply. The man approaching was tall, appeared to be in his early 40s. He was wearing a narrow-brimmed grey felt hat and grey topcoat. Buddy's first impression was of a state department type, but as the man neared he saw something else there: hardness showing in the man's eyes, the square jaw set in the same rock-hard manner as Steve's, the thick hands. Buddy glanced at Steve, found his jaw muscles hard, his eyelids narrowed. "Trouble?"

Steve disregarded the question, waited until the man stopped in front of them; then the infectious grin exploded over his face. "Buddy, this is Hardy. He likes to play tag."

Buddy watched Hardy study him momentarily, then look at Steve.

"You were supposed to call this morning, McMann."

Steve feigned concern, shook his head. "Damn! So I was. I've got a hell of a memory. I guess I had too much on my mind . . . Buddy arriving . . . You know how it is."

Buddy saw a flash of anger in Hardy's blue eyes.

"You're playing a dangerous game, McMann. You've done your part. It's time to step aside . . . Or are you thinking about playing a different game now? Maybe you've decided to sell—" He didn't finish.

Buddy looked quickly at Steve, saw that his grin had hardened. For a moment he thought Steve was go-

ing to slug the man, but he just shrugged, said: "Hardy, why don't you leave me alone." Then he turned and walked stiffly away. Buddy was about to follow suit when Hardy grasped his left arm. The grip was uncomfortable, and he realized the man was concealing a lot of power beneath his topcoat.

"Merrill, if you think anything at all about that thick-skulled Irishman try to talk some sense into him. He's in over his head."

Buddy attempted to pull away, but the vicelike grip didn't loosen. "Look, mister, I don't know who you are, but I'm beginning to take a real dislike to you. If you don't let loose of my arm I just may stuff this suitcase down your throat." It was strong talk to a man who appeared to be in twice the shape he was, but Buddy couldn't hold back the anger boiling up in him. He was surprised to feel the grip loosen and Hardy's hand drop away. He started to turn, but stopped as Hardy spoke. The voice was softer.

"Merrill, I believe I may have to take a chance with you . . . You might be McMann's last hope."

Buddy studied the man's eyes. Hardy seemed to be trying to make up his mind about something. "I don't know what this is all about, but you can be sure I'm with Steve all the way. Just get that clear." The statement had a different effect than Buddy had expected. The last trace of anger drained from Hardy's eyes. He nodded.

"Yes, I believe you are. But I don't think you realize what's going on. You don't, do you?"

Buddy felt the puzzlement show on his face. "Christ! No wonder Steve cut out. You make about as much sense as an auctioneer."

Hardy's expression didn't change. "I thought so. You don't . . . And that means you're in more danger than McMann is." He reached into his coat pocket, pulled out a card and handed it to Buddy. "Keep this. Both my home and office numbers are on it. If you find yourself in trouble . . . call. And tell McMann he hasn't much more time. We can't let Josef Dobrynin get to him."

"Josef Dobrynin?" But Hardy had turned and was already walking away. Buddy watched him head back along the taxi stand, tried to make some sense out of the crazy quilt pattern—when he saw a man who apparently had been staring at them from the depot doorway look quickly down at a newspaper. He was a tall, slim man with unusually wide shoulders, closeset eyes and a lean, dark face with a crescent-shaped cheek scar that was dead white against his swarthy skin. The brim of his black felt hat was turned down all the way around, European fashion, and one end of a dark wool scarf hung down the front of his heavy winter coat. For a moment Buddy believed the man might have been with Hardy, but discounted the thought

when Hardy walked by him without recognition—Buddy was still staring at him when he realized Steve had pulled his car up beside him.

"Come on, kid. Don't let Hardy worry you."

Buddy turned automatically and found Steve grinning at him. "Who was he?"

"Nobody important. Get that crap in here; we've got things to do."

Buddy disregarded the proding. "Who was he, Steve?"

McMann shrugged. "Jim Hardy . . . CIA."

"Central Intelligence Agency? What the hell business have *you* got with CIA?"

"Less than Hardy believes, kid. Hell of a way to welcome you to D.C. Don't let it concern you . . ."

"According to Hardy it *does* concern me."

"Oh? What did he tell you?"

"As little as he could. He said I may be your last hope . . . that I should try and talk some sense into you . . . that he can't let Josef Dobrynin get to you."

"Hardy talks too much."

"Maybe. But just enough to start me seeing things. I thought I saw some guy right out of an Eric Ambler spy novel watching while Hardy and I were talking." Steve's reaction sent a chill along his spine. He had stiffened momentarily, then covered it up quickly with one of those explosive grins.

"Yeah? Where?"

"Right over by the depot door. He—" But as Buddy turned to point he found the man no longer there. He turned back, a foolish look on his face, and Steve laughed.

"Get in, kid. You've been reading too many books."

Buddy smiled sheepishly, shook his head. "Maybe you're right. Let's get out of here."

They joined the chain of cars on Pennsylvania Avenue, past the Capitol, the White House and the Justice Department, and the gray granite doorways of government, Buddy trying to convince himself that what had happened was normal in Steve's life. After all, Steve *was* a private investigator, and there *was* a certain amount of risk in the job. Even so, Hardy's warning seemed pretty strong. And Hardy was CIA.

"You're going to like the pad, kid. Get a chance to do much sailing down South?"

"Haven't been on the water for a year."

"I'll fix that. I've got a ketch . . . We'll go out tomorrow."

"Don't let me change your routine. I'm sponging, remember?"

"You're painting. But the rest will do you good. You'll be back at the canvas soon enough . . . Then I want to see more like the last one you sent me."

"Portrait in Blood?"

"That one's got it, kid."

"You're the only one who thinks so, but thanks anyway."

Steve glanced at him, cuffed him lightly on his chin. "It's worth a lot more than you think."

Buddy couldn't help smiling as he looked at Steve. There was some unfathomable kind of amusement in his eyes. But he had stopped long ago trying to figure out Steve McMann's mind and just let himself enjoy the man's company. Steve always had a way of making him forget his problems.

If it hadn't been for Hardy and the scene at the depot it would have worked now, but one thing Hardy had said kept digging at him. If what Steve was involved in was something routine, a normal private investigating case, then why was it that Hardy had called *him* by his last name. He distinctly remembered Steve had never mentioned it during his short conversation with the CIA agent—but Hardy had called him Merrill.

Steve had to be involved in something pretty serious if the Central Intelligence Agency had gone to all the trouble to check out a friend who lived a couple thousand miles away.

Buddy tried to get the thoughts out of his head by watching the steady stream of cars move toward them. The headlights looked like gliding fireflies. Red, blue and green Christmas lights winked along the edge of Pennsylvania Avenue. Far ahead the Washington Monument pointed like a great white finger into the sky—Five

minutes later Steve's voice pulled him from his thoughts and he realized they were skirting the Potomac River.

"It's just up ahead. I'm ready for a drink: how about you?"

"I could use one." He studied the shore homes as Steve turned off on a side street. They looked to be in the \$50,000 class. Steve had been doing well. Then they pulled up before a two-story beach type. The light in the front window showed up the gilt letters on the glass.

STEVE McMANN

Private Investigator

24-Hour Service

"The palace, kid. Come on, let's get this stuff inside. After a shower you'll feel like a new man . . . Then I'm going to take you out on the town. We'll hit it for old times sake . . . You still get sick when you drink?"

Buddy smiled as he opened the car door, remembered the time he upchucked when Steve got him loaded on his 21st birthday. It was good to be with him again.

They walked side-by-side with his gear to the door, neither talking, both lost in their own thoughts of the past. Buddy breathed the familiar smell of boats: paint, manila lines, turpentine. At the door Steve managed to fumble out his key, but as he started to stick it in the lock the door opened and a girl was silhouetted in the light.

"I heard you drive up, Steve . . . So this is Buddy."

Buddy just stared. She was the prettiest girl he'd seen in years. Her seal-black hair was shoulder length, brown eyes enormous, eyelashes bigger than butterflies. She was about five foot four, somewhere around 23-years-old, and she couldn't have weighed more than 110. Her breasts were beautifully defined in a tight-fitting turquoise sweater, her full hips beneath an autumn brown tweed skirt.

"Okay, kid, cover your fangs . . . She's mine . . . Maxey, Buddy, and viceversa. My secretary, kid, and the Maxey's short for Maxine." He leaned down and kissed her on her cheek. "How come you're still here?"

Maxey motioned with her head. "You've got a visitor."

"Business?"

"John Reed."

Buddy noticed Steve's eyes narrow momentarily.

"I know you have plans for tonight . . . but I thought you'd want to see him . . . I told him he could wait." Maxey's expression showed that she thought she might not have done the right thing.

"You were right, princess. Never snub a State Department man." He glanced at Buddy. "I'll make this short and sweet, kid."

After introductions in Steve's office-living room Buddy sat on the edge of a paper-littered desk and studied the surroundings as the two men talked and Maxey mixed drinks at a portable bar by the rear

picture window. Steve had done a good job making the place blend into both office and home—wall-to-wall carpeting, modern Danish furniture, French telephone, paneled walls and a big fireplace. There was a tarpon mounted over the fireplace and a half dozen of Buddy's own paintings on the walls, his abstract *Portrait in Blood* hanging prominently behind Steve's desk.

Out the picture window, in the wash of the house lights shimmering on the dark Potomac water, he could make out Steve's ketch moored at a short pier. Beyond, in the channel, a buoy light winked on and off.

"Pretty, huh?"

Buddy turned, found Maxey holding a gin and tonic in front of him. Her teeth were even and small, her smile infectious. The fingers that held the glass were long and tapered, the nails perfect ovals. Looking at her he couldn't help realizing what he was missing out of life because of his creative urge.

"I remember Steve saying this is your type of poison . . . Hope I made it right."

Buddy took the glass, sipped at the drink. "Perfect." Her smile practically melted him.

"So you still haven't come to your senses, Steve. I was hoping Hardy was mistaken." Reed had a soft voice and a relaxed manner.

"We've been through this a half dozen times. You know what I'm attempting to do."

Buddy turned his attention back to Steve and John Reed. The mention of Hardy's name renewed his interest. Reed apparently had something to do with the mess Steve was in. That realization set him to studying the man more closely. Reed was fairly short, about 60, and obviously the VIP type. His face was handsome, florid, and his silver hair lay back from a high broad forehead as if it were engraved. His eyes were gray and very wide awake for a man of his age. He looked to be in the sort of condition that comes from daily squash sessions. A custom-made silk shirt and a silver brocade tie showed from the open black felt collar of his topcoat. He was holding a dark Homburg and a pair of pearl-gray gloves in his right hand.

To a man who wasn't observing, John Reed might have appeared to be the typical Washington phoney, but Buddy realized after listening to the man that such an observation would be a mistake. Reed was alert, calculating, and extremely intelligent.

"Yes, Steve, I know what you are attempting to do. You've made it very clear." Reed took a gold cigarette case from his inside breast pocket and snapped it open. He extracted a slim oval tube with an elegant gold crescent, had it lit and inhaled deeply before he spoke again. "And I warned you what a dangerous game you're playing. You're a fool to think Josef Dobry-

nin will come to you. The man is too smart to take such a chance. And you've been fortunate so far. Dobrynin won't be as easy to handle as the man from whom you took the plans."

Steve shrugged. "Perhaps."

Buddy watched John Reed draw again from his cigarette. The man stared steadily at Steve, the smoke trickling out his nostrils. It looked like lamb's wool, and when it reached him Buddy found it the mildest and sweetest of Turkish tobacco.

"Steve . . ." There was a note of pleading in John Reed's voice. "You've done your part. Now, why don't you hand over the microfilm and be done with this thing. I've no doubt you're an excellent private investigator; you've proved that. But now you're getting in too deep. You haven't been trained. Dobrynin is a master spy. He will stop at nothing to get what he wants . . . Nothing! He's managed to avoid detection by the best agents of both the CIA and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. You're no match for him."

Buddy recognized the stubborn set of Steve's jaw. "And it's *because* nobody has located him that I've got to try. This is the closest anyone has been. Nobody has ever dangled this kind of bait under his nose before. He'll come out in the open . . . And when he does I'll be here to meet him."

Reed lifted his hands in a motion

of defeat. "Well, I see it's no use talking to you, but I'll give you one last chance anyway. Will you hand over the microfilm . . . now?"

"No." There was finality to Steve's voice, and his jaw was set rock hard.

"Then I guess there is nothing more for me to say. If you are bent on continuing in your insane plan . . . I believe Dobrynin will not hesitate in killing you."

The blunt statement stiffened Buddy. He heard a slight intake of breath from Maxey, frowned as Steve turned and winked.

"Don't pay any attention to him, kid. Government men tend to lean toward the dramatic."

Reed ignored the gibe. He smiled and his manner changed. "Perhaps you're right, Steve . . . I hope so . . . for your sake."

Buddy, despite the man's sudden affability, didn't care for the constant reminder that Steve was in danger—serious danger. He was glad to see John Reed put on his Homburg and walk to the door.

"Oh, Steve . . . I almost forgot: I sent my chauffeur home when I realized I might have to wait for you for some time. I've a dinner appointment at the Sheraton . . . I wonder if I could impose upon you—"

"No trouble." Steve winked at Maxey again and puckered his lips into a kiss. "Sweetheart, see that Buddy finds his way upstairs." He turned to Buddy and grinned. "I'll

be back by the time you've showered and shaved, kid . . . And swallow some butter *before* I take you out on the town. I'm still not too sure about that stomach of yours." He was still chuckling as he closed the door.

It was while he was beneath the shower that the real seriousness of the past hour's happenings really started to get to Buddy. At first it had seemed exciting: Steve McMann, private investigator, holding both the State Department and the CIA at arms length while he played a game of life or death with a Russian spy. But now the full impact of John Reed's warning—that Steve could actually be in danger of losing his life—was weighing heavily on him. Steve had always been able to take care of himself in any situation, yet, as Reed, and Hardy for that matter, had pointed out, he certainly hadn't received the proper training to pit himself against a master spy.

And Maxey's concern after Steve had left them hadn't helped him discount his worry. She had attempted to cover up while she mixed him a second drink. But while she was saying good-bye at the door 10 minutes later Buddy was aware of her anxiety. As he watched her walk toward the bus stop her shoulders seemed to be rounded forward beneath her blue gabardine raincoat as if she were carrying the weight of the worry with her.

Buddy was dressed and downstairs 20 minutes later mixing himself another drink. He smiled as he remembered Maxey telling him not to get Steve too drunk because he had a lot of work to do in the morning. If Steve was anything like he used to be they would be getting in just about the time Maxey came to work. He knew it was going to be one hell of a night —It wasn't until 15 minutes later that he remembered Steve said he would be back before he finished his shower, and another 10 minutes after that that the first tinge of uneasiness began to take hold of him.

It was 9:30 when he quit rationalizing and admitted to himself that something definitely might be wrong: it had been an hour and a half since Steve and John Reed had left the office. He knew he should do something, but what? Maybe Steve had been detained with John Reed. Perhaps the man hadn't really given up and was still attempting to convince Steve to cooperate with him, to turn over the microfilm he had talked about. He would look like a fool if he called the police only to have Steve call or come home after a search was started. That's when he remembered Hardy, the card the CIA agent had given him at the railway depot.

He had just dialed Hardy's home number when there was a knock on the front door. "It's unlocked." His first thought was of Steve, and a sudden relief flooded through

him, but as the door opened a cold chill passed through him. It was Hardy, and the agent's face was pale with strain— And there was a uniformed policeman standing behind him.

"Merrill . . . I'm afraid I have some bad news . . . It's McMann."

Buddy stood frozen, the phone receiver clutched tightly in his hand. He could hear a woman's voice on the other end saying hello.

"He's dead."

Buddy was aware of very little that Hardy was saying to him as they drove away in the police squad car. There was something about routine, an identification; then he was being led into the police morgue, to a room with wall vaults. It was over in two minutes, his quick nod as the attendant pulled back a rubber sheet and he stared down at Steve's body, the small bloodless hole above Steve's heart.

"I realize how you feel, Merrill. This must be a terrible shock . . . but I'm going to have to ask you to come with me."

Buddy couldn't speak. He just nodded. He was hardly aware of what was happening the next 10 minutes, the drive to CIA headquarters. Then he was in an office with Hardy and two other agents.

"Sit down, Buddy."

It was the first time Hardy had called him by his first name, and for some unexplainable reason it struck Buddy as funny. Maybe it was the

sorrow that had been building up inside him. Maybe he was grasping at something, anything, that could make him laugh, forget.

"Ordinarily we would wait until tomorrow to talk to you, Buddy, but unless we find that microfilm immediately our country is in grave danger. We must know if McMann confided in you. . . . Did he have the film with him tonight?"

Buddy was still having trouble trying to understand the whole sordid picture. He stared out the window at the night, a bank of white fog in the distance.

"Buddy . . . this is of the *utmost* importance." There was a sudden sternness in Hardy's voice.

Buddy turned and stared vacantly at the man. "He didn't tell me anything . . . There wasn't time." He saw disappointment show in the faces of the three men. "The first time I heard about any microfilm was when a State Department man was waiting for us at Steve's place. That was shortly after we left the station." He tried to remember the man's name, couldn't. "Steve left the office with him."

"Yes; I know. That was John Reed."

"And I suppose he's dead, too."

"No; he's alive, but he's got a headache from being slugged. It was McMann that Josef Dobrynin was after."

"But what happened? I don't understand all this. What the hell did

Steve have to do with the microfilm? Why was he mixed up in it?" There was a lurking anger in Buddy's voice.

Hardy sensed the young man's agitation, and for a moment considered just how much to tell him. Then he came to a decision. "Buddy . . . what I'm going to tell you is known by only a few people . . . That's why I must ask your strictest confidence. You will be on your honor not to repeat it."

Buddy nodded automatically.

Hardy glanced at the other agents, then back at Buddy. "Somehow McMann, through his underworld contacts, learned that highly secret plans outlining a revolutionary advance in the development of the Laser Ray had been filmed by one of the assistant scientists involved in its perfection. In case you are not familiar with it, Buddy, the Laser Ray is a narrow concentrated beam of light capable of generating heat hotter than the sun. It is the perfect offensive weapon in time of war. Since Russia and the United States are engaged in a race to harness the ray's powers you can realize that any new advance is of the most significant importance.

"Russian agents, after learning of it, were intent on obtaining the secret . . . and aware of this the young scientist let it be known that his microfilm could be obtained by the highest bidder. Your friend, McMann, did not go to the CIA or the FBI when he learned of this.

Instead, he pretended to be interested in buying the film for an important party and arranged a meeting with the man.

"Our scientist was not experienced in such matters. He took the microfilm with him, and McMann was successful in taking it from him . . . but he was almost killed in the process. The man *did* have enough sense to come to the rendezvous with a gun. McMann was forced to kill him after our scientist became suspicious and pulled out his weapon."

Buddy looked from Hardy to the faces of the two other agents, then back at Hardy. It was all beginning to make sense.

"The whole affair was foolish on McMann's part. Yet, if he had handed over the microfilm to us his part could have been forgiven. After all, the United States owes him a debt . . . But he chose instead to try for bigger game . . . For three years the Russians have been obtaining highly secret information from the government through a man we know only as Josef Dobrynin. Although all efforts to locate Dobrynin have been used . . . his true identity still remains unknown. McMann, through his investigation service, knew of our search for the man. He also felt that with the microfilm for bait he could induce Dobrynin to come to him."

Buddy shook his head. That would be Steve: always the impossible, always the big try.

"It was a very dangerous game, and McMann realized that he would have to let the CIA in on the plan. He reported the death of the scientist, but nothing we could say, no threats could convince him that he should let us take over. That's when he told us of his plan to trap Dobrynin . . . It was finally decided that nothing would be gained by prosecuting him. We could only continue to talk to him. I gave him three days to change his mind. Unfortunately it was one day too much."

Buddy breathed deeply. He shook his head wondering what had possessed Steve to take such a risk. But he really didn't have to wonder: he knew. It was like Steve to try something like that.

"It wasn't long until the State Department was advised of what was going on," Hardy continued. John Reed is an official in their investigation department. He had spent many hours trying to talk McMann into releasing the microfilm to him. He even went so far as to arrange a meeting between McMann and the Undersecretary of State. Your friend was very polite, but nothing the undersecretary said would make him budge . . . He seemed to have a personal vendetta against spies and Communist sympathizers."

"He hated them," Buddy said.

"Tonight John Reed asked me to talk to McMann for the last time. It was decided that if I couldn't

change his mind Reed, himself, would talk to Steve one more time . . . and if *he* got no satisfaction he would get him to the State Department on some ruse and hold him for sterner measures. We couldn't wait any longer. We couldn't take the chance that McMann might fail and Dobrynin get the film . . . It was on the way to the department that McMann and John Reed were confronted."

Buddy questioned him with his eyes.

"Yes; we believe Dobrynin was behind it. Fortunately he had no reason to kill Reed. His men slugged him and left him in McMann's car. The police found him about an hour later, and I was notified shortly after. . . . It wasn't long after that that McMann's body was fished out of the Potomac."

Buddy, for a moment, could visualize the hole in Steve's chest. He shook away the picture.

"Buddy, we believe Steve was as stubborn with Dobrynin's men as he was with us. We don't think McMann had the film with him. He was playing a fool's game, but he was too smart to get caught that way. Dobrynin, no doubt, would have liked to keep Steve alive longer and get the information out of him, but McMann saw to it that didn't happen. We found his gun in the car. . . . It had been fired twice. We believe he forced Dobrynin's men to kill him so they couldn't resort to torture. We believe the

film is still hidden. . . . You see, Buddy, that's why I need your cooperation."

Buddy felt helpless. "But Steve told me nothing! I hardly had time to talk to him!"

"And I believe you. But he hid that microfilm someplace, and Dobrynin will attempt to find it. . . . He may even decide to ask you?"

Buddy's eyes widened. "Me? But . . ."

Hardy sat on the edge of the desk. "Now, Buddy, tell me everything that happened, everything that was said from the first moment you saw McMann at the depot until he left you at his home. He may have given you a clue without your knowing it."

It was almost midnight when Hardy drove Buddy back to Steve's house. He obviously had been disappointed at what Buddy had recounted. But Steve had purposely kept him in the dark—probably to keep him from danger. It was the way Steve had always been: even in death he was watching over him.

"Buddy, one of our agents is going to keep an eye on Steve's place for a few days. . . . Until that microfilm is located you'll be in great danger."

Buddy looked at him sharply. "Danger! What danger can I be in? I don't know where the microfilm is."

Hardy stared grimly ahead at the mist blanketed street. "I know that . . . but Dobrynin doesn't. There's

a good chance he may send someone to find out just what you *do* know. The methods the man will use to extract that information might not be too pleasant."

The disclosure left Buddy with little to say.

Five minutes later Hardy slowed the car and turned onto the street that fronted Steve's house. He strained his eyes ahead at the mist. "There. You see that car parked down the street?"

For a moment Buddy could see only the rolling mist; then the outline of a car took shape as Hardy pulled up before the house. His first thought was of Dobrynin. It sent a shiver through him, and it was only then that he realized he was scared: a Russian spy might be after him. It was one thing associating himself with a hero in a book, but this was real. There was someone waiting to torture him for information he didn't have, a man who wouldn't hesitate to kill—who already had killed once in the past few hours. And now he was after *him*! He realized he was clenching his fists on his thighs, and that Hardy had noticed his fear.

"Take it easy. . . . It's our agent. He's going to park there for the night. In the morning we'll have another man here . . . and you've always got the phone. You can call me anytime. . . . Do you still have my card?"

Buddy nodded, felt some relief wash through him.

"The picture may not be as bad as I've painted it. Dobrynin knows by now we have a man planted here. It would be foolhardy to try to get to you under the circumstances. He may have given up trying for the microfilm, too: we're too close to him now. Rather than take a chance he may have decided to let this game end. . . . He's too valuable for the Russians to lose."

The statement partially reassured Buddy. He managed a halfhearted smile. "I hope you're right." Yet, there was still the underlying fear throughout his body.

"How long do you plan to stay in Washington? I'd like to suggest that you make plans to leave as soon as it's convenient. Nothing will convince Dobrynin more than your departure that you know nothing . . . or that if you do you have given all the information to the CIA and the microfilm is in our hands."

Buddy nodded. "Just long enough to get Steve buried. I'll have to settle up his business. He'd expect me to do that."

"Has he any family?"

"Just me." And he remembered 10 years before when his parents were killed and Steve had taken him under his wing. "*I know how you feel, kid,*" he had said. "*I lost my family before I was even old enough to know I had them. You're my family now.*"

"Well, see to it as fast as you can. . . . And don't worry: I'll keep an eye on you. . . . Now, you'd better

sack out. It's been a tough day. I'll call you in the morning."

As Buddy got out of the car he realized that his entire body was wracked with fatigue: the trip, Steve's murder, the session at the CIA office had taken its toll. He would welcome sleep, a chance to forget the agonizing picture of Steve lying dead on the morgue slab with a hole in his chest.

He remembered when he got to the door he didn't have a key, then recalled he had not locked it when he left with Hardy and the policeman. He stepped inside and groped for the light switch, found it, but as the light flooded the room his heart seemed to skip a beat—Steve's papers were strewn over the floor, the office was a shambles: desk top cleared, drawers pulled open, filing cabinets gutted of their folders. Even the carpeting had been pried loose and rolled to one side of the room, and every chair and cushion had been slashed and the stuffing thrown on the floor. He could see by the way his paintings were hanging askew that whoever had done the job had even looked behind them.

He turned to call to Hardy, but as he stepped outside he saw the red tail lights of the agent's car disappear. For a moment he considered yelling to the CIA man in the darkened car down the street, thought better of it. He'd wait until Hardy got home, call him then. If anyone was scouting Steve's house he did-

n't want to give the CIA man's presence away.

He walked back into the office, staring at the mess, and locked the door behind him. At least it proved Dobrynin hadn't got the plans from Steve. But he *could* have them *now*; and if he did Buddy knew there was little the CIA or the State Department could do about it. The Russians would have a hundred ways to get them out of the country—and Steve's death would have been for nothing.

He went upstairs steeling himself against the mess that he expected in Steve's bedroom—It was as bad as he had suspected: the place *was* a mess. The intruder had evidently made his entrance by forcing the porch French doors. They were open, and the room was cold and damp. Steve's clothing had been taken from the closets and searched. Suits, sport coats and trousers were piled in a heap on the floor. The bed mattress was slashed, the dresser drawers pulled out, contents emptied. As was the case downstairs the carpeting had been pried loose and rolled up. Even the bathroom was a mess, and the top to the toilet closet was off and resting against the stool. Whoever had made the search had missed nothing.

He stared at the mist shrouded porch. Thank God whoever the man was hadn't slashed his paintings—And with that thought he stiffened. There was a sudden tingling in his stomach. The paintings!

He stood rigid, recalled his earlier conversation with Steve.

*"I want to see more like the last one you sent me."*

*"Portrait in Blood?"*

*"That one's got it, kid."*

*"You're the only one who thinks so . . . but thanks anyway."*

*"It's worth a lot more than you think."*

He remembered the amusement in Steve's eyes—and it came to him in a flood.

He came unglued all at once and took the stairs in threes. He ran to the Portrait in Blood, quickly scanned the varying red abstract, the front of the frame, but nothing had been tampered with. He jerked the painting from the wall hook and looked at the back: still there was nothing to indicate anyone had tampered with it after he had sent it to Steve a month earlier. Carefully, nervously he searched the mess on the floor looking for something to pry out the nails holding the canvas in the back. He tried first with a ball point pen, found it was no use. Cursing, he brushed a pile of papers and folders to one side, saw a gun and a strange holster, then a pliers. He was like a mad man. He ripped out the nails and the canvas frame fell away—and then his body went cold.

It was practically hidden from the naked eye—the thin line in the lower part of the main frame. Hardly breathing, he stuck a fingernail at one end and lifted—A three-inch

long by one-half inch wide piece of microfilm came into view.

His fingers felt numb as he held the film to the light. It revealed dozens of tiny equations that he realized would take him a lifetime to understand. One thing that he *did* understand, though—he was holding the plans to his country's newest weapon advance, and there was a Russian spy who would stop at nothing to obtain them.

All the assurance he had gained from Hardy only a half hour earlier was replaced now by a gnawing fear. He realized the sooner he got rid of the microfilm the sooner he would be safe. He started for the door, stopped suddenly and forced a laugh. What the hell was the matter with him? Five minutes more wouldn't make that much difference. By now Dobrynin was convinced the plans were not in Steve's house. The search had been thorough. He could call Hardy and let the agent come for the plans. It would be better than running out on a darkened street calling to the CIA man in the car. It was possible that Dobrynin had someone watching, and that the agent would be murdered even before he could get to the CIA offices.

Buddy found the phone beneath a pile of papers on the floor, dug out the card Hardy had given him, and dialed the agent's home number. He was on the last digit when he realized that something was wrong. He had heard no dial tone. The phone

was dead. He lifted the cord and it gave to his touch. Of course! The intruder had pulled it loose in his wild search. He had probably done the same to the upstairs phone. But why? Was he waiting outside? Was he waiting for him to walk out so he could kidnap him and take him to Dobrynin? The coldness again passed through Buddy's body. Yes; that was it. The man hadn't found the microfilm so he was going to kidnap him and find out if he knew anything about it.

Buddy realized that he would never make it to the agent's car. It was likely the man wouldn't be able to help him anyway: it would be a simple thing for someone to sneak up behind the man in the darkness and the mist and put him out of action while the kidnaper did his job.

Buddy's eyes swept the room as he tried to think of some way out, stopped suddenly on the gun and the strange holster on the floor. Relief flooded through him. He picked up the gun and removed the cartridge chamber— It was filled with bullets. But what was the strange holster? It took him 15 seconds before he figured it out. It was made like a man's stocking garter, elastic at the top and bottom, and was built to fit around the calf.

He knelt and pulled up his right pants leg. Yes, that was it. It snapped on just below the knee, and the lower clasp just below the curve of the calf. He left it snapped there and stood, feeling a little more

secure. If anyone was waiting outside he would be able to meet him on equal terms. Even so, the thought wasn't too consoling. He had never fired a gun in his life. He was an artist, not a gunfighter. That thought sobered him. He looked again at the phone on the floor. Perhaps the intruder *hadn't* torn loose the cord upstairs. Perhaps this had been accidental. He was grasping at straws, anything to keep from having to go outside. Still, it was a possibility.

Quickly he started up the stairs. *And he was so occupied in his new found hope that it wasn't until he was halfway up that he became aware of the man standing at the top. The man with the crescent-shaped cheek scar dead white against his swarthy skin who had been watching him at the depot— And he had a long barreled pistol pointed down at him!*

"Do not cry out, Mister Merrill." As the man spoke, his voice heavy with accent, only the left half of his lips moved revealing dull metal teeth. The right side of his mouth seemed to be frozen, and his right eye drooped slightly.

Buddy couldn't have yelled if he'd wanted to. It felt as if someone had hands around his throat choking away any sound. He stood frozen on the steps staring at that half paralyzed face before him, waited for the flash of the gun, to feel a slug rip through him.

"You have nothing to fear if you

do as I say." The man's good eye seemed to be alive with inner fire; the other stared dully straight ahead. "I had hoped it would not be necessary to confront you, but as you have now surmised I was not successful in my search for the microfilm."

The assurance that he wasn't to be shot brought some of Buddy's life back, but the realization that the man confronting him was probably Josef Dobrynin sent his fear balling up in the pit of his belly. He knew the Russian agent would not hesitate in killing him if he didn't get what he wanted. The microfilm in his pocket felt as if it were burning through the cloth, and the gun strapped to his leg seemed a hundred miles away. He managed to find his voice. "What do you want?"

The left half of the man's thin lips curled in smile. "Come now, Mister Merrill . . . let us not delay. It is only the microfilm I wish. If you tell me where it is you will not be harmed: I will only bind your hands and legs and leave. I am sure that by morning, when Mister Hardy discovers the phones are not in order, he will send someone to free you."

Buddy realized that Dobrynin must have been waiting outside for him to arrive. When he turned on the lights the agent again climbed to the balcony to confront him. But he had been too careful. He had waited upstairs because he knew of

the CIA agent parked on the street, and he hadn't seen him locate the microfilm. Buddy was aware that all he had to do now was hand the film to the man and, except for an uncomfortable night, he would be free of the whole mess. He was very close to reaching for it—when he thought of Steve's bullet-punctured body. Steve McMann, the man who hated Communists, the man who thought so much of his country that he would die a violent death to protect it.

"Come, Mister Merrill . . . I am waiting!"

Why the words came out the way they did Buddy didn't know; yet he heard himself saying, "I don't have any microfilm. If I did I'd sure as hell give it to you." He felt the ball of sickness in his belly begin to spread as Dobrynin's eyelids narrowed and his thin lips stretched tight. "Believe me! I'm telling you the truth! The CIA had me at their offices tonight asking me the same thing, but there's nothing I can tell anybody . . . Steve didn't tell me a thing." He saw the uncertainty in Dobrynin's good eye. It was a long time before the agent finally spoke.

"Perhaps you *are* telling the truth, Mister Merrill. Then, perhaps you are not. Whichever is true . . . I must be sure. You must know that I have ways of extracting information. . . . Some not too pleasant."

Buddy felt numb, but he had to go ahead. He had to make an attempt. Steve would have tried **no**

matter what the consequences. "I *am* telling the truth."

"We shall see. . . . Walk up the stairs, but walk carefully."

"Torture won't do you any good. I can't tell you what you want to know."

"Be calm, Mister Merrill. Torture won't be necessary. That is something only for spy novels . . . or for agents who have caused us a great deal of trouble. I'm sure even an artist such as yourself has heard of sodium pentathol. You are probably more familiar with its popular name . . . truth serum. The Germans used it quite effectively during the second World War. It will be sufficient to find out if you are telling me the truth. I only hope, for your sake, you are. If it proves you are not . . . I may not let you off so lightly."

Buddy became aware of the wetness of his palms, the shaking of his hands: his ruse wasn't working. Hell, he was no match for a master spy! He'd tried. No one could blame him now for turning over the film. Dobrynin would find it anyway after he administered the truth serum; yet, something held him back from blurting out the fact as he fought against it he kept seeing Steve's face, kept remembering how he died. And there was *still* a chance he might escape. Of course! there was still a chance—and he knew he would never be able to look at himself in a mirror again unless he took that chance.

He walked stiffly up the stairs trying to control the fear inside him. He could see now that the gun Dobrynin was pointing at him had a silencer, realized the man would not hesitate to shoot if he attempted anything. There was no risk of the sound being heard by the agent in the car. "You're wasting your time."

"Perhaps, Mister Merrill. Now, walk to the balcony. You will find it an easy climb down. . . . And do not try anything foolish; I am an expert shot. The slightest indiscretion

Buddy made his way down the porch trellis through a slight rain drizzle that had permeated the mist. Wind was cold on his face. He could hear Steve's ketch groan as it rolled against the dock fenders, the gentle slap of waves lapping rhythmically at its hull. Far out in the river channel a bell clanged restlessly in the night. Overhead a gull screamed: the shrillness of the sound set his nerves on edge.

The escape plan he had devised during his climb to the ground was soon forgotten. He had decided to make a run for it and get lost in the mist, but Dobrynin gave him no opportunity. The agent kept his gun leveled at him as he made his own descent without wavering for an instant. Buddy found he could do nothing but watch helplessly. Then it was a matter of only a few minutes before he was prodded to a car a half block away on a side street.

When he first saw the automobile

he realized that inside he would have a chance to grab the gun while Dobrynin tried to drive and keep his eyes on him and the street at the same time. But this, too, proved to be a bad idea. Seated behind the wheel was a man in a dark trenchcoat, his hat pulled low on his forehead. He didn't look like much: he was wearing square-cut steel-rimmed spectacles, and a roll of chin fat sloshed over his shirt collar. A black toothbrush moustache sprouted surrealistically below a pug nose with wide, flaring nostrils that showed hair. Even so, Buddy realized from the man's tight disagreeable lips he was probably as dangerous as Dobrynin. The odds against escape had doubled against him.

"Do not delay, Mister Merrill. Get in."

Buddy did as instructed. "Where are you taking me?" He was shocked at the hollowness of his voice.

"You will know soon enough."

The feeling of the gun strapped to his calf was the only comforting thing Buddy felt during the next 15 minutes. On two occasions he had almost got the courage to make a stab for it: once when Dobrynin glanced momentarily through the side window, and another when the car was halted for 30 seconds at a stop light. But neither occasion proved long enough for him to get up enough courage to make a move. He knew he'd probably be shot be-

fore he got his pants leg raised and the weapon out of its holster.

It wasn't long until he realized they were in Georgetown. Rows of restored 18th century homes lined the narrow streets and small lights burned bright holes in the white mist. The drizzle had developed into a steady rain and the street was black and shining wet. The car lights punched twin yellow tunnels into the night—the only sounds the tires on the wet pavement, and the swish of the windshield wiper blades.

Then they were parked on a dark side street; and a few minutes later they made their way through growing puddles to a two-story Georgian Colonial with fluted white columns, louvered shutters and Federalist gables. They walked quickly up a narrow alleyway of bricks and the chubby driver unlocked a door.

"Inside, Mister Merrill, quickly."

Buddy moved with the prodding of Dobrynin's gun and found himself in a darkened kitchen. A silver of light showed beneath a door on the far side, and it was in that direction that the gun kept prodding. But as Buddy started to push open the door Dobrynin grasped his arm.

"Not yet."

Buddy held up as the man reached around him and knocked on the door four times. For a moment there was only silence; then he heard a slight movement. Shortly there was a muffled, "Enter." But when Buddy pushed the door **open**

before him, and his eyes quickly swept the large room, he didn't find the man who spoke.

The room appeared to be a study. There were several over-stuffed chairs in dark man's colors that stuck two inches into turquoise wall-to-wall carpeting, a heavy oak desk at the far side of the room in front of closed maroon velvet drapes. The wall to his left was completely covered with book-filled shelves interspaced with an artistic array of sculpture—carved women's heads in polished ebony, teak and sandalwood. The cream-painted wall to his far right was bare except for a small red brick fireplace and two black silhouettes of periwigged Colonial gentlemen facing each other hanging above. A pair of exquisite Cinquecento candlesticks decorated the fireplace mantel. An expensive stereo hifi completed the picture, and an oversized dark leather divan—*Buddy stiffened and the blood chilled inside him.* Stretched out on that divan was a girl. She was on her stomach, her legs taped together and her wrists taped behind her. Maxey! The jacket to her tweed suit had been removed, and the left sleeve of her sweater pulled up.

Outrage began to swell up in him as he hurried to her. "What the hell have you done to her?"

"Calm yourself, Mister Merrill. . . . She has not been harmed."

Quickly Buddy knelt beside the girl, brushed her hair **back** and put

his hands to her face. She was unconscious, in a deep sleep. There was a strange smell about her. "You've drugged her. You—" The words stuck in his throat. He swung around, hate growing in him.

"Do not attempt anything rash. She is quite all right. The serum has not yet had time to wear off."

"But why *her*?" Buddy's voice was sharp with anger.

"That should be fairly obvious. She was Steve McMann's fiance. It seemed very likely he had confided in her. . . . We felt that she might have had knowledge as to where he had hidden the microfilm. Unfortunately, she did not. But perhaps when you are injected . . ." He didn't finish.

"I told you that I know nothing." Why he was still attempting to convince Dobrynin he didn't know: perhaps it was just fear. His only hope now was that the man would stick to his promise and let Maxey and him go without retaliation for his lying. Any thought of getting to the gun strapped to his leg before the needle punctured him he had cast aside. Dobrynin was pointing his own silencer-mounted weapon straight at him. He didn't have a chance.

"Anistov. . . . Prepare the syringe."

Buddy felt the last hope draining out of him as he watched the fat man with the toothbrush mustache walk to the desk and lift a small

bottle. It was at that moment that he heard something like a cigarette lighter snap into life and saw a slight movement against the velvet drapes behind the desk. It was evidently the man who had told them to enter. But why was he hiding? Buddy stared at the drapes, watched a white waft of smoke come from between the folds. A moan behind him took his attention. He turned quickly, still kneeling, and saw Maxey's eyes flutter open. "Max . . . Are you all right?"

It took a few moments for her to adjust; then she sighed, "Buddy . . . they . . . he . . ." Her face was drawn, haggard.

"It's all right. Take it easy I'll have you away from here soon."

"No. He . . ."

Buddy couldn't understand the concern in her voice. And then she wasn't looking at him: she was staring like a frightened animal over his shoulder. And it was at that moment he smelled the smoke—a little sweet as if it had been made from blended Turkish tobacco. Shocked, he turned sharply—*knew who he would see*. "You!"

John Reed said nothing. He smiled, displaying flawless white teeth, and he regarded Buddy in a friendly manner.

"But . . ."

"Yes, Merrill, it is I. And I can understand your shock."

It still wasn't registering on Buddy. It was all coming too fast. "But . . ."

"But what am I doing here? You surprise me. Even one who dabbles in the arts should be able to figure that out." John Reed smiled again. "But then I suppose you have not had sufficient time to take into account all you have witnessed since your arrival."

It hit him then, like a hammer blow on the head. The man who had confronted him in Steve's home, the man he had believed to be Josef Dobrynin . . . was not. The man the Central Intelligence Agency and the FBI were looking for was not standing before him. Buddy blurted it out before he could catch himself. "Dobrynin!"

John Reed shrugged. "A name I assumed, Merrill, when I first began working for the Russians. It has proved to be a good alias."

Buddy was hardly hearing the man. Hate was beginning to boil in him. He stood, staring angrily at John Reed, the man's confidence grating him even more—the way he was holding his Turkish cigarette casually before him, even the way he was dressed: expensive and well-tailored maroon smoking jacket, open-necked raw silk shirt, silver cravat, black flannel slacks and highly polished black shoes.

"You killed Steve!"

"That was unfortunate. It had all been planned . . . the kidnaping, but McMann proved to be more able than we had expected. He managed to draw his gun. . . . I'm afraid it was either him or Brezh-

nev." He looked momentarily at the man Buddy had believed to be Dobrynin. "Colonel Brezhnev is coordinator of Russia's U.S. Spy Networks. McMann could hardly be expected to be a match, although with proper training he might well have been."

Buddy again felt the anger welling through him.

"That is why it was necessary for me to send Brezhnev to search McMann's home. I see he wasn't successful or he would not have brought you here. That is also unfortunate."

It was beginning to sink into Buddy. He had been a fool to believe the man he had thought to be Josef Dobrynin would let him go alive. He realized with a shudder that if he had handed over the microfilm Brezhnev would probably have killed him on the spot. The agent was forced to take him with him to administer the serum because he was not sure whether Buddy was lying. Now he would be killed when the serum revealed his secret—and so would Maxey! Why else would John Reed have revealed himself? He could not afford to let them leave alive. He glanced down at Maxey. Fear was a wild thing on her face. She was biting at her lower lip.

Buddy looked again at the fat man in the trench coat. He was holding the syringe before his thick glasses. The needle glistened in the light. The lids of his eyes looked

like toad's, flabbily sunk in stupor. Buddy knew he had to do something; and he had to do it fast. Once that needle punctured his skin he was as good as dead. For a brief second he thought of making a desperate try for the gun, realized he wouldn't have enough time. Brezhnev had his weapon lowered, but he would have plenty of time to get it raised and fire. Then Buddy made a last mental grasp. If he could only get them off guard for a moment he and Maxey might have a chance. He knew he had to try. "You'll let us go after you find out I know nothing?"

There was amusement in John Reed's eyes. "I'm sure Colonel Brezhnev informed you that you will not be harmed."

Buddy knew that Reed was convinced he was a complete idiot not capable of realizing what was in store for him even though Reed had revealed his identity. That thought, he knew, would put the spies off guard. "Okay. But I hate needles. . . . It will work just as well in my leg, won't it?"

John Reed considered the question. "I don't see why that should make a difference." He glanced at Anistav and the man nodded, layers of chin sloshing over the collar of his shirt. "All right, Merrill, if you feel the needle will hurt less there, then the leg it shall be."

Buddy managed to feign relief. "All right, let's get it over." As the agent crossed between him and

Brezhnev he knelt trying to keep his hands from shaking as he pulled up his trouser leg. When he got the cuff to the bottom of the holster excitement was tingling in his chest, but he managed to calmly reach up and get his hand on the revolver. "I'm ready." And with that statement he yanked the trouser leg up and pulled out the gun.

He was hardly aware of what was happening during the next few moments. Anistav jumped up startled in front of him just as Brezhnev's gun fired. Through the silencer it made only a light pop. Buddy heard Anistov grunt. The man threw his arms wide and began falling toward him, his mouth open as if he wanted to scream but couldn't. Then Buddy heard his own gun explode. He had aimed it wildly at Brezhnev, and he had missed. The agent's gun popped again and Buddy was swung around sharply. There was a sharp pain in his left shoulder.

He was trying to lift his own gun for a second shot when Anistav toppled over on him and pinned him on top of Maxey. He was aware of her scream just as he managed to fire again. He cursed. He had missed his second shot also, but it had put Brezhnev off guard. The Russian was scurrying to his right trying to get a clean shot around his fallen comrade, but Anistav was covering Buddy.

For a brief moment Buddy got a glimpse of John Reed: he was pull-

ing a gun from under his coat, but he disregarded the man. This time he took careful aim and fired. The slug caught Brezhnev just as he squeezed off his third shot. Buddy heard the bullet go by his left ear, but he knew by the way Brezhnev fell to the floor the Russian would never fire a gun again. He was swinging his weapon around toward John Reed when the whole room seemed to explode around him. Both the kitchen door and the front door crashed in.

The last thing he remembered before passing out was Hardy yelling at John Reed to drop his gun.

He woke with the bitter fumes of gunpowder prickling his nostrils; then he felt the sharp pain behind his eyes. It was a long time before he could properly focus on the faces looking down at him.

"Take it easy. There's an ambulance on the way."

Buddy realized he was on the couch, and he was staring up at Hardy's blue eyes. There was a nagging throb in his left shoulder. "How bad is it?"

"You'll live." Hardy smiled.

Buddy glanced around him, found Maxey. Concern contorted her features. "You okay?"

She nodded, unable to find her voice. Her face was chalk white. She looked sick.

Buddy looked again at Hardy. "This is as bad as a Western movie. Just in the nick of time. . . . How did you know?"

"Tried to call you when I got home and found McMann's phone dead. That worried me. I radioed our agent in front of your place and he went in and found the mess and you missing. It wasn't long until another agent who had been watching John Reed's house radioed in that you had been brought here."

"Then you knew about Reed?" Buddy was surprised.

"No; we didn't. I had a man tailing him without his knowledge merely as a precautionary measure to protect him in case Dobrynin attempted to get at him again. It wasn't until I found out you had been taken to his house that the puzzle fell in place and I realized that Reed was in on this thing . . . that he could in fact be Dobrynin himself." Hardy glanced behind him at the two Russians lying side by side on the floor. "You saved the government a little expense by finishing off those two."

"I only got one. The other got in the way of his own comrade's bullet." Buddy stared for a moment at Brezhnev, shuddered. The man's mouth was open showing the metal teeth, his eyes staring at the ceiling. There was an ugly blue-rimmed hole over his right eye, and dried blood covered the right side of his face. Realizing he had been responsible for the man's death sickened him until he remembered it had been Brezhnev who had killed Steve. The man had deserved to die.

"I told the agent to wait," Hardy

continued. "I didn't want him to tackle this thing alone. He might not have succeeded . . . and Reed would have escaped. I didn't know you were going to come up with a gun and start all the fireworks before we got set to bust in. We were just about ready to move when we heard the first shot. . . . But it all came out okay except for that hole in your shoulder. Now all we have to do is find the microfilm."

"That's easy." Buddy smiled as Hardy questioned with his eyes. "Just take it out of my pocket."

For a moment Hardy was immobile; then he moved all at once. He held the film to the light and scanned it hurriedly. "But, where —"

"Now you're the one to look surprised. When I left your office and found Steve's place torn up I re-

membered something he had said to me: that one of my paintings was worth more than I thought. It was the only thing not searched completely and I put two and two together. The film was in a recess in the frame."

Hardy's jaw muscles tightened. "We owe him quite a bit . . . and you."

Buddy remembered Steve's body at the morgue, quickly shook off the thought. "Not me . . . just Steve. If it wasn't for him you wouldn't have Dobrynin." He felt a sharp stab of pain in his shoulder and closed his eyes. He could feel the nausea coming on.

The last thing he heard before passing out was the shrill wailing of an ambulance siren—the last thing he felt, the reassuring hand of Maxey on his forehead.



# bene- fici- ary

BY NATALIE JENKINS BOND

*Inspector Guy was no fool. He wasn't about to be taken in by a three time beneficiary . . . even if she was an attractive widow like Mary McCall.*

THERE is a certain tenement building on Second Avenue near 51st Street that should be torn down. And salt poured on the ground where it stood so no greedy landlord could ever again raise such a structure to house suffering humanity.

Inside is a long, dark narrow hallway that runs the length of the building. Near the front door is a steep staircase that rises from the first floor to the third in a diagonal line. At the second floor there is a break in the banister where a tiny landing allows the tenants of the floor to get off . . . or those on the third floor to catch their breath before they resume the tortuous ascent.

The apartments are laid out two to a floor; a front and a back. They are exactly alike; each boasting three rooms . . . a kitchen, a bedroom and a "parlor."

The kitchen is long and skinny with a single window opening onto an airshaft. There is a wooden ice-box and two sanitary washtubs which are mere camouflage. When the tin top is lifted they are one tub, large enough for an adult to climb into and take a bath. Next to the tub is an early model, rusty gas range. And beyond that a sink, with a single gooseneck brass faucet from which only cold water has ever spouted.

A closet in the hall on each floor encloses a community toilet.

It is hard to believe that love could flourish in such surroundings. But the testimony of the neighbors was unanimous that attractive Mary McCall had loved Michael; so dearly, in fact, that when Michael fell down the stairway and broke his neck, the shock of losing him had caused her baby to be born prematurely. It became a puny child with none of the healthy beauty of her two older children.

It was strange that after the tragedy Mary remained in the squalid flat. Perhaps it was apathy. She rented the "parlor" to Eric Swenson, who had been Michael's friend. Eric, a seaman in the Merchant Marine, was away a good part of the time. So Mary had the use of the parlor and the rent of it as well.

Eric was in port on Thanksgiving Day. And it was he who provided the plump capon for the feast, as well as a bottle of sherry. Mary gravely poured the sherry into wineglasses for herself and Eric and mixed some with water for the children.

The wine brought a glow to Mary's face. Her large, sad eyes lost their usual look and shone brightly. Also she became more talkative.

"This is the first celebration I've had since Michael's death," she told Eric. As she spoke Michael's name, her voice faltered.

Eric had carefully avoided this subject. Now he ventured timidly: "It's queer about him falling down those stairs . . . but he did take a drop too much, now and then."

"He was as sober as could be, though he had been drinking a bit the night before," Mary said. "Michael was not one to start the day with drink, and it was seven o'clock in the morning, when he fell."

"There ought to be a law against stairs like those," said Eric. "It's a wonder it hasn't happened before."

"He called them 'the stairway to Paradise.'" Her lovely eyes became filmed with tears and her voice thickened as she added: "It left me nothing to live for . . . except the baby. That's what kept me alive . . . that little bit of Michael . . . like a gift from the grave."

Eric was suddenly conscious of Diedre, Mary's ten-year-old daugh-

ter, whose face had paled. And whose large blue eyes, so like her mother's, were wide open with a strange, lost look.

"You had me Mummie," she whispered.

"Yes, dear," her mother said, "of course."

Mary's other child, Sean, said nothing. He sat with his heavy dark brows drawn together and his eyes lowered to his plate.

Mary glanced at the clock. "It's past baby's feeding time. I'm surprised she hasn't begun to cry." Mary was silent for a moment. "But she didn't sleep well last night, so I expect she's making up for it now."

Mary took a bottle filled with the baby's formula from the ice-box and placed it in a pan of water on the stove. She tested the warmth of the milk on the back of her wrist and left the room.

Suddenly a scream brought Eric and the two children at the table to their feet.

Each looked at the others blankly for a moment. Then they hurried through the hall to the bedroom where Mary had gone. They found her kneeling on the floor beside the baby, whose face was blue and whose hands, like tiny fans, were spread wide open.

Eric looked around the room, noting the bed with its tall headboard and the crib beside it, with the side down and the baby blankets and sheets tumbled into a mound.

The mother was rocking on her knees, muttering over and over in a high thin voice: "My little baby . . . my little baby!"

Eric knelt beside her to get a better view of the infant, whose head hung like a flower broken on its stalk. He could see the child was dead. As Mary stretched her hand toward the little body, he caught and held it.

"Don't touch the baby, dear, wait until the coroner comes."

At the word "coroner", Mary became inconsolable. Eric covered the tiny form with a blanket. He took Mary to the "parlor" and seated her in a rocking chair. Her hysteria had given place to a trance-like state, so she offered no resistance.

"I'll have to go to the police station," he told the children, who had followed him into the room. "You stay with your mother, and don't leave her, even for a moment until I get back. I won't be long. It's just around the corner."

\* \* \*

At police headquarters downtown, Chief inspector Arthur Guy leaned back in his chair and belched. He had eaten too much Thanksgiving dinner. Much too much. He felt heavy and sleepy. It had been a slow day, so far. He hoped it would continue that way.

At that moment the phone rang. . . .

When the inspector put the telephone back in its cradle, he sighed deeply and scratched his head. He

loosened the belt around his huge girth a notch and leaned back. Next, he opened the top drawer of his desk and took out a small box of stomach pills. He popped two in his mouth and chewed them thoughtfully. Then he reached for his hat. . . .

Inside the hall of the tenement house, he looked up the steep stairway and groaned. "It ought to be an escalator," he said to Morris, the patrolman who accompanied him. "It's as long as the one at 53rd and Lexington. And that," he said, staring fiercely at the man, "is the second longest stairway in the world."

Inspector Guy labored up the stairs, pausing at intervals to groan. When he reached the top, however he became briskly efficient.

The photographers and fingerprint men had come and gone. The coroner was just snapping his bag shut when Guy accosted him:

"What did you find?"

"Murder." Answered the coroner. "Neck broken."

"Couldn't have rolled out and broken its neck?" Asked Guy who was looking from the open sided crib to the tiny body on the floor.

"Could have, but didn't," answered the coroner. "Look at the sides of its neck."

Guy leaned close to the body and saw the thin purple streaks at either side of the small neck and nodded slowly.

"How long?"

"It's hard to tell. Maybe three

hours. My men will come for the body shortly. I'm on my way."

After the coroner left Guy went into the "parlor" where Mary sat in the rocker, slowly clasping and unclasping her hands. Diedre stood beside her patting her arm. The boy and Eric Swenson sat silently on the daybed.

"I'd like to talk to Mrs. McCall alone." Said the inspector.

"I'll take the children for a walk." Suggested Eric. Then to the bereaved mother, "We'll be back in half an hour, Mary. Tell the inspector everything you know about this. He wants to help you."

When they reached the corner, Eric stepped into a small shop for his three ounces of shag, which he put into his tobacco pouch.

"Would you like some candy?" He asked the children, who were patiently standing in the doorway:

"I'd like some bubble gum." Said Diedre.

"Why does a pretty little girl like you, chew that awful stuff? Oh, well!" Eric bought the gum and gave it to her. The boy could not decide what he wanted, so Eric gave him a quarter, which after a moment of polite hesitation, the lad pocketed.

When they returned later to the parlor, Inspector Guy was still there. He was looking down at Mary. "Was your husband insured?" he asked.

Mary nodded. Her hand was over her mouth so that her words

were mumbled: "He belonged to the Longshoremen's Union. He was insured with them for \$5,000."

"Did he carry any other insurance?"

"Two thousand dollars." She looked up at him, "I collected double that because he died of an accident."

The policeman's eyes narrowed. "What about the baby . . . was it insured?"

"Yes," answered the woman, and as though an explanation was necessary: "It's cheaper to insure children at birth. All the children are insured."

He waived the insurance on the other children. "How much did you carry on the baby?"

"Five hundred dollars . . . it only costs twenty five cents a week."

"The baby's insurance can't be collected if the child is under six months old. Isn't that true?"

She nodded. "But you see, the baby was six months old a week ago."

"That means your take in insurance pay-offs for this year will be \$9,500." He announced harshly.

She did not answer.

"You are doing pretty well, aren't you, Mrs. McCall?"

She looked up at him through a veil of tears but she made no reply. For a moment his face softened, but as he turned to the children, who were standing in the doorway with Eric, the grim lines returned to his mouth. His eyes ran over the boy,

who stood there in his neat dark blue suit.

"Tell me what you did today from breakfast on, Sean." His voice softened. The inspector had two boys at home; freckled faced youngsters who played in the Long Island sunshine, and whose well run home was a far cry from this dark tenement flat with its twilight hallways.

Sean schuffed the toe of his shoe against the floor and let his long lashes fall as he answered: "I read the funnies and went to church."

"Wait a minute, son . . . what time did you leave for church?"

"I left at 10:30 . . . I sing in the choir . . . at least I did until today." He turned to his mother, "I didn't get a chance to tell you, Mom."

His mother was looking at him but she gave no sign that she heard him.

The inspector encouraged: "What time was church over?"

The boy looked up sullenly. "At 12:30 . . . but I had to change my clothes again. When I got in the vestry, Father Ryan, the choir master, said he wanted to talk to me. I hung around for some time. He told me he would have to drop me from the choir because my voice is changing. When I got home dinner was ready."

"Did you go into the bedroom after you came home from church?"

"No. I knew the baby was having her nap."

"Do you mean you waited over two hours on the father?"

"I waited a long time. He saw several people ahead of me."

"I can check with Father Ryan. Did you see anyone at all, stranger or otherwise, in the halls or on the stair case today?"

The boy slowly shook his head.

The inspector turned to Diedre: "Tell me what you did today."

She looked up at him with her clear blue, black lashed eyes, her face so charming framed in its nimbus of pinkish gold curls with the sheen of spun candy, that he added "Honey."

"After early mass I had breakfast. Then I took a tray of breakfast into Eric." She looked at him for confirmation and he nodded.

"Then I read the funnies and went to church. I came home ahead of Sean. I walked with Mary Costello. We played hop-scotch."

She paused to examine the adult faces around her, as though expecting a rebuke. Getting none, she excused herself anyway:

"It isn't right to play on Sunday. But it isn't a mortal sin." Again she looked at the faces about her and seemed crestfallen when no one commented. "Then I came home. Mummie was cooking dinner and I was in the way, so I went out in the hall and played jacks until dinner was ready."

"Did you see any strange person in the halls or on the stairs?"

She thought this over. Then shook her head.

The inspector started to pick up his hat, but found that it was stuck to the table. He pulled it loose. On the inside of the brim was a chewed piece of bubble gum. At the sight of the gum Mary came to life. "I've told you to stop leaving that nasty stuff everywhere!" She approached Diedre and slapped her on the cheek.

The inspector, whose sympathy for Mary was now non-existent, turned and started for the door, pausing as he passed to pat Diedre's shoulder. "How about walking a ways with me?" He asked Eric.

The Flying Dutchman Tavern stands near 2nd Ave and 51st Street. In spite of its name it's as Irish as a shellelagh.

"Come in and have a beer," suggested Eric. "There are a lot of things you will want to ask me and a few I'd like to ask you."

They went in and sat at the end of the dim, empty bar.

"How long have you known the McCall woman?" Enquired the inspector.

"A little over two years. I met her the night Michael met her."

Inspector Guy glared at him, his eyes as cold as peeled grapes. "Do you mean to tell me that Michael McCall wasn't the children's father?"

"Only the baby's."

"Then why didn't she say so?"

Eric took a long pull on his pipe. "Why didn't you ask her?"

Guy countered this question with another: "What happened to her first husband? I hope he didn't fall down the stairs, too."

"He was drowned in the Mediterranean. He was in the United States Navy . . . a gunner on a tanker."

"Don't tell me . . . let me guess . . . he left some insurance!"

"Just what any American widow gets when her husband is killed in action . . . ten thousand dollars."

"She's made this insurance business quite a career, hasn't she? \$19,500 in the past ten years." He started off on a new tack: "What do you know of the first husband?"

"He was named Sean O'Keefe. He was what is known as a 'red' Irishman. That's where Diedre got her pretty red hair. I've heard in this very bar that Mary walked around more than once with a black eye and a banged up face which she got from his fist when he was drunk on a Saturday night."

"What about the second husband?"

"Michael? It was love at first sight with both of them. We were in New York one night with nothing to do and Michael took me to a dance given by the Catholic Club. That's where they met."

"Michael and me shipped out a few days later on the barque Marie

Enfield bound for Rio. When we came into port again they were married by the parish priest. I was best man. After his marriage, Michael left the service and got a job as a longshoreman."

"Where were you seven months ago when Michael fell downstairs?"

"I had shipped out on the freighter Southern Queen. It was a month after his death when I returned to port. That's when I learned of it."

"I called to see Mary. I didn't know how she was fixed, so I offered to rent the front room. I thought she might need the money . . . and it's as much a home as I ever had."

Guy eyed the tall blond Scandinavian over his beer. "How do you feel about Mary McCall?" He asked archly. "In love with her?"

Eric did not answer the question directly. "I feel that she never killed her man," he said, "nor her baby."

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to marry a pretty widow, would it?" He urged. "Especially one with a dot of \$19,500. By the way, what did YOU do today?"

"I'd had more than a drop last night. Not too much but too long. I got home about three o'clock. Diedre woke me at nine with the breakfast tray. I ate the breakfast and cleaned the room. Sometimes on a Sunday Mary likes to sit in there, it being the parlor. I woke

in time to shave and dress for dinner, which was at three."

"You wouldn't be above marrying for her money?" Asked Guy for the second time.

The Scandinavian took a well-worn wallet from his pocket from which he extracted an equally well-worn bank book. He held out the book to the inspector, who saw that the sum of \$26,000 was deposited in the savings department of the Corn Exchange Bank to the credit of Eric Swenson.

"I'm going to make my will," said Eric, "I've no near kin and I'd as soon leave it to Mary as not."

"The more fool you," said Guy, who finished his beer and returned to the tenement house, where he opened the lock of the third floor back apartment with a skeleton key.

Then Guy knew why no one had answered his knock. The kitchen showed evidence of a fire that had wrecked it so badly that he wondered why it hadn't swept through the whole building. Probably, he thought sourly, the fates didn't think the building worth burning.

An elderly Jewish couple lived on the second floor front. The type who keep to themselves.

"Poor woman," said the old man when he heard the news, "it is hard." But no, he had seen no one in the halls. It was so dark on the staircase and his eyes were not too good. Berta, his wife wrung her

hands and asked the inspector to stop by on his way up for some good hot soup to take to Mary to "keep her strength up, poor thing."

The second floor rear was occupied by a young woman of such easy virtue that she thought Guy had come to pick her up for her nightly activities. When she discovered that he was not interested in her personal life, she was anxious to help. But she had nothing to tell him beside the fact that the people on the first floor front were away for the day, spending the holiday with relatives in Newark.

She, herself, had spent the night in the Bronx with a girl friend and had only returned a few minutes earlier. Which was obviously true, for her hat and coat were still on a chair with wet galoshes beside it.

There remained only the first floor rear apartment which was occupied by a pair of unsavory young men. They had repainted the walls a brilliant shocking pink and furnished it in modern black furniture. These two assured the inspector that they had nothing at all to do with the inmates of the house.

It was not until the next day that Inspector Guy got around to St. Mary's and All Angel's Parochial School.

Sister Scholastica, whose countenance shone with that well scrubbed look that so many nuns have, said in answer to a question about Mary: "She's a good wom-

an, who has had a very sad life. Her first husband was not a good man. He drank and was abusive. And her second husband died of an accident. I sometimes think she neglects the older children for the baby. But it is true a small infant needs a lot of care."

She looked at the inspector with the candid gaze of a child, as she continued: "She nearly went mad when the tragedy happened . . . and she saw him lying there . . . she tried to jump after him . . ."

"Tell me about the children."

Her face brightened and a tender smile played about her mouth. "Sean is a fine boy. He is a good student and a good son."

"And Diedre?"

"You've seen her? She is the nearest thing to an angel one can see on this earth. She gives me less trouble than any of the children . . . but she is lonely. She loves her mother very much . . ."

A visit to Father Ryan elicited the information that Sean had left the vestry about 2:30 the past Thanksgiving. The boy was truthful, Father Ryan said, but shy. He was quiet and not popular with the other boys.

\* \* \*

A week later Eric called at downtown headquarters for permission to ship out on the Mohawk for Panama. Guy had no reason to detain him. Certainly no evidence that a grand jury would consider. So he told him to go.

Guy had nothing on anyone. The finger print tests had merely shown the prints of Mary, Sean and Diedre in the bedroom and they had every right to be there.

\* \* \*

The baby's death was still unsolved when Eric walked into Inspector Guy's office two weeks later. "I hate to report this," the Scandinavian said heavily, "but it's for Mary's sake as well as mine that we get it straightened out."

"What are you driving at?" enquired Guy.

Eric hesitated, then cleared his throat and said: "I came into Port three days ago. Since then I have missed money twice."

"Sure you didn't lose it?"

Eric shook his head slowly. "Tuesday I put forty dollars in my bank book and put the book where I always put it . . . in a tin box in the dresser drawer. Wednesday the money was gone but the book was where I had left it. Last night I put a hundred and ten dollars in the book and put it, as before in the tin box in the drawer. I did not leave the room after I put the money there. This morning the money was missing again."

That was on Friday, just three days before Christmas. The inspector sent two of his best detectives, who went over the flat with a fine tooth comb; but with no result. Mary, Sean and Diedre were questioned carefully. No one knew anything. They all agreed that they

had seen no stranger in the halls.

Guy began to wonder if the money had really been stolen. There was only Eric's word for it and Eric was by no means in the clear. The fact that he was in love with and wanted to marry Mary gave him the only motive besides the insurance motive that had come to light.

And if Eric planned to marry Mary, the insurance motive could be ascribed to him as well as Mary. It was true that he could not have killed Michael because he was thousands of miles away at the time; Guy had checked with the Maritime Office and his papers were in order. But there was nothing to show that Michael's death was not an accident. Insurance companies do not pay out money if there is the slightest chance of foul play without first investigating carefully. And this policy had been paid.

In the baby's case it was possible that Eric had not wanted to bring up another man's child and had used murder as the means of avoiding it. Also, he may have thought that with the baby out of the way, Mary might turn to him, as indeed, it seemed she had.

Suppose Eric had murdered the baby . . . he might also want to get rid of the other children . . . and they too, were insured. It was the thought of Diedre that decided him to arrest Eric on suspicion of murder.

As the inspector rode uptown, gaily decorated Christmas trees shone through windows and occasionally snatches of Christmas carols could be heard.

There was a crowd in front of the tenement and a uniformed policeman was pushing it back from the doorway. Guy elbowed his way through the doorway into the hall. In the dim light he could see a man's body, lying midway on the stairs, his foot caught in the banisters.

Mary McCall was bending over the figure wringing her hands.

For once, the inspector got up those stairs in record time. It was Eric who was lying there with his head at an impossible angle.

"Get upstairs," he said harshly to Mary. "And stay in your apartment."

He motioned to the policeman who was valiantly trying to get the crowd out of the doorway. "Arrest anyone who doesn't go home quietly," he said. "And go outside and telephone your report to headquarters."

Guy cursed himself for not having arrested Eric sooner. At least he would now be alive.

When the coroner arrived the inspector went upstairs to the third floor. Mary stood in the kitchen doorway her hand over her heart.

Her pose disgusted him. "Congratulations," he said. "You have now collected forty five thousand dollars. A banner year, I'd say."

"I didn't do it," she whispered. "We were going to be married."

He pushed his face forward like an angry bulldog. "I know, that's how you got him to will you his savings." He turned to one of the several policemen who were now in the upper hall. "Take this woman to headquarters for questioning."

"What about the children?" She asked tremulously.

He snatched the camel's hair coat that hung on a nail on the kitchen door and thrust it at her. She left with the police officer.

When Diedre saw her mother go down the stairs with the policeman, she burst into tears. The inspector put his arm around her and patted her shoulder. "You mustn't cry," he said, "you must be a big girl."

But the child beat her tiny fists against him and wept for her mother.

"Tell me where you and your mother were when Eric fell downstairs."

"We were in the kitchen," she sobbed. "Sean, Mummie and me. Eric went down to get some more wine."

It was a darn shame about the children, thought the inspector. But they would be better off in a home than living with a woman like their mother.

He stood at the top of the stairs and stared at the long expanse of steps going down, down into the

dimness. Then he spoke to Patrolman Morris, who stood beside him: "Get the longest electric light cord you can find and the strongest bulb. We are going to tear these stairs apart."

When the length of cord with the bulb on one end and the socket on the other was screwed into the wall the stairs sprang into brilliant sharpness. The two men got down on their knees, examining banisters and steps, inch by inch.

Their examination showed nothing more than an occasional knot-hole in the worn wood of the treads. There was a large one on the third step from the top. Guy paused to run his hand over this knothole. It was flush with the wood but there was a small hole about a quarter of an inch in diameter at one end. He slipped his penknife in the hole and the entire knothole lifted easily.

As he lifted it up he saw the edge of currency at one side of the hole. He put his fingers in and pulled at the money. When he got it out he saw that it had been held in place by a wad of bubble gum.

He looked though the uprights of the banisters into the lovely eyes of Diedre. "Get your coat child," he said heavily, "and come with me."

As they drove downtown Diedre told him in her soft little confiding voice how much she loved her mother . . . and what fun they had had going to picnics and movies . . .

of how she had told them stories after they went to bed . . . until she married Michael.

"Then she acted like Sean and I weren't there at all. It was always: 'run away and play'. Last spring I was going to have a birthday party with a cake and candles . . . and four girls in my class were coming to my party. But Michael wanted Mummie to go out with him . . . So Mummie gave me five dollars and told me to take the girls to the movies and buy them ice cream instead."

Diedre looked at Guy gravely. "It wasn't the same," she sighed.

"That night Mummie told Michael that they were selfish and I should have had my party. But Michael said: 'with that face she'll have anything she wants in a few years.'

"It made me mad."

When her mother made her run away and play, she had been in the habit of sitting on the stairs outside the apartment. One day while she was playing jacks, she had discovered the loose knothole.

"I could lift it out with my little finger." She held up a tiny digit, so that the inspector saw that indeed, she could.

"The next morning when I came home from early mass, I was still mad with Michael."

She had sat on the steps, thinking about her spoiled birthday and her finger had found the knothole. "I pulled it up and pushed it back

sideways and thought: "He can just step around it. But he didn't step around it." She looked up at Guy as though she had just said "Amen."

"We were real happy for awhile," she went on. "And then things were worse than ever after the baby came. Mummie didn't pay any attention to Sean and me. She was always with the baby . . . such an ugly little baby!"

"On Thanksgiving Day, when Mummie was cooking dinner, she told me to run out and play. I sat on the steps for awhile . . . and then went into Eric's room. But he was asleep. So I went into the bedroom. The baby was asleep. I stood and looked at her . . . such an ugly little baby! I squeezed the baby's neck because I was mad because Mummie loved her more than me. I guess I squeezed harder than I meant to because the baby's head fell back real queer and I became frightened. I put her on the floor so that people would think that she fell out of her crib . . ."

The charming little face, framed in its aura of pinkish gold looked at the inspector pathetically:

"But it didn't do any good . . . Eric was always there . . . So she didn't have time for Sean and me. Then he went away, but he came back again. I tried to make him angry by taking his money. I knew where he kept it because I watched. When he slept, he snored. So I went in while he was snoring

and took the money out of the book in the box in his dresser drawer. I hid the money under the step, because I could not spend stolen money. That," she said primly, "would be a mortal sin.

"I thought then he might go away. But last night, he told Sean

and me that he was going to marry Mummie. . . ."

She put her soft little hand in Guy's.

"Where are you taking me?" She asked trustingly.

But he was too appalled to answer.

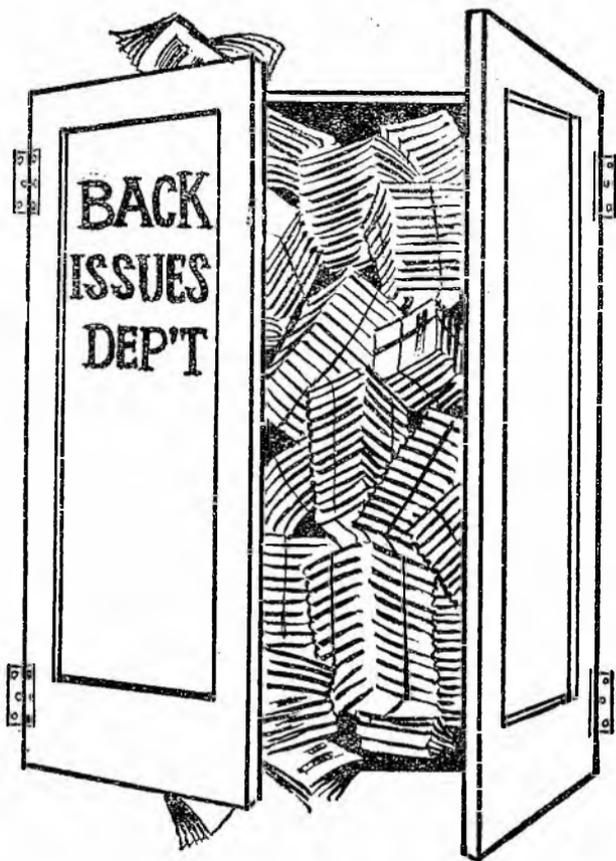


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**J**AKE HARLAN relaxed in the soft reclining seat as the big blue and white bus reached the edge of town and picked up speed, heading south. The late evening sun shone through the tinted glass, accentuating the hard lines of his face and the salt-and-pepper of his hair, making him look older than his thirty-four years. But Jake couldn't be expected to resemble a college sophomore; twelve years in prison isn't usually considered to be a beauty treatment. Nor does it make a man overly prosperous: the cheap serge suit and ten bucks, given him by the warden this morning, comprised his entire fortune.

Jake closed his eyes and sat still, enjoying the freedom that he couldn't, as yet, realize. After

twelve years it would be difficult to break the habits that had become so much a part of a man in Prison. He smiled, thinking by the time it was all out of his system he'd probably be right back in again, this time on Death-Row. Jake Harlan was going home, to kill the man who'd been responsible for sending him up in the first place. . . .

He'd been twenty-two then, with an idea and a girl. The idea was to build a string of garages all over the State; the girl was Kathleen Carlson, whose blue eyes and coppery hair, coupled with a well rounded silhouette, caused Jake to get dry throated and clumsy handed. He already owned a small garage, from which he expected the others to

BY  
BILLY GILL



*He'd been framed by a crooked cop. And now, after twelve years, he was about to straighten that crooked frame.*

---

# TURNABOUT

grow, but it didn't seem important when he was with Kathy. In fact, when they were together, the only thing he considered important was the one thing Kathy would slap hell out of him for trying.

When the garage began showing a steady profit, Jake made a small down-payment on a house. Picking out the furniture, he was ashamed to tell the sales clerk how nearly broke he was; the clerk must have been pretty smart for, when the bill was made out, it equalled Jake's bank balance, almost to the penny. Two weeks later, before a near-sighted old Justice of the Peace, whose wife and maid acted as witnesses, Jake Harlan and Kathleen Carlson were married.

During the next six months business at the garage picked up considerably, maybe because Jake could concentrate more on his work and less on Kathy. He might even have accomplished his dream of owning a string of garages if Patrolman Ned Barnes' car hadn't developed engine trouble.

The sleek little sports car stalled at the traffic light in front of Jake's garage, and stubbornly refused to start again. Jake watched as Barnes, careful not to soil the neat blue uniform, peered under the hood with the air of a man who doesn't know what he is doing. Cursing, he slammed the hood viciously, face beet red with anger. Getting back into the car, he ground hopelessly on the starter. Jake grinned. Cops

made him nervous, for no reason he could explain, so to see one discomfited helped his sense of humor.

Barnes gave up. "Say, Bud, can you fix this damned thing?" Then needlessly, "It won't start and I'm due to go on duty, pretty quick."

"I gathered as much," Jake laughed. "Sure, I'll take a look." Gathering a few tools, he went out to the car.

As Jake delved into the engine compartment, the young Cop nosed around in the garage. He took in the clean floors, neat spare parts bins and well worn tools. Hearing Jake hit the starter and the engine start to purr smoothly, he came out calling, "That was quick, what was wrong with the old buggy?"

"Not much," Jake replied, "Usually if one doesn't crank, the trouble is in the ignition system." Then, as Barnes reached for his wallet, "Never mind, this time it's on the house."

"Thanks," Barnes said. "Uh, by the way, could you paint a car here too?"

"Sure, I've got enough equipment here to do darned near anything to a car; except buy one." Jake laughed self-consciously.

"All things come to him who waits—if he works like hell while he's waiting." Barnes waved and drove away.

Next day Barnes came back, this

time leaving his car for Jake to paint. Looking at the polished unmarred finish Jake thought, "It needs painting like I need a hole-in-the-head." But he didn't say anything to Barnes.

During the next weeks Barnes came in every few days, sometimes for auto repairs that, for the most part, weren't needed; other times he'd drop by just to talk. The fact that Barnes was a cop gave him three strikes and out as far as Jake was concerned. He wasn't a typical policeman but he was what an uneducated, slum-reared boy would consider typical. The over-bearing manner and flat, expressionless eyes that never seemed to look directly at a person bothered Jake. He tried to make it clear that he didn't like Barnes, but his hints were either unnoticed or ignored. Jake started to worry. Barnes must be after something, feeling him out, maybe, but for what reason Jake couldn't figure. Well, he didn't have a hell of a lot of choice but to wait and see.

One night just before closing time, Barnes drove in and offered to buy the drinks. Curiosity made Jake accept the offer; locking the doors, he thought "Well, well, here's the pitch."

"Jake," Barnes said, as they settled into a booth, "How would you like to make some real money, a lot more than the chicken feed you're pulling down now?"

"Thought you had something on your mind," Jake murmured, "but

you haven't said anything yet. Keep talking."

Barnes looked around carefully, making sure they wouldn't be overheard, then hunched forward in his seat. Just like the bad guy in the movies, Jake thought, wanting to laugh. Then Barnes was talking again.

"Well, I know some boys who can use a good mechanic. General repairs, painting and such, plus a place to store cars for a day or two at a time."

The term "to store cars," told Jake what he wanted to know. "Hot cars," he said. "That's why you had me do the paint job and repair work on yours: to see if I was good enough to fill the bill. Your boys steal 'em and bring 'em to me for camouflage, then out of the state for a sale. Right?"

Barnes laughed. "Smart Boy. It's OK, then?"

Jake wanted to say yes. It sounded good, and he knew he could dress up a car so the owner himself wouldn't recognize it. And the money; there were lots of things Kathy needed for the house. Besides, with a little money he could branch out, start setting up that string of garages.

"Go to Hell," he said.

The good humor left Barnes' face. "Think about it, Jake." He finished his drink and stood up. "Think about it real hard."

"I said go to Hell," Jake replied easily, "I meant it."

Kathy wrinkled her nose when she smelled the liquor on his breath, but didn't mention it, determined not to be a "nagging wife." Jake told her about it while they were doing the dishes; and Kathy changed her mind about being a "nagging wife." She wanted Jake to go to the police with the story. Jake was sure that's what she wanted because she told him, dozens of times; throughout his favorite television program; in the bathroom as he got ready for bed, and in bed. At midnight Jake finally blew his top.

"Shut up, Goddammit," He yelled. "How the hell do I know which cop to talk to? For all I know, they could all be mixed up in this. And besides, wouldn't I look cute, pointing the finger at anybody, especially a cop, without a damn bit of proof. Now, shut up and go to sleep."

This was a long speech for Jake, but it brought the desired results. Kathy lay quietly on her side of the bed for awhile. Then soft hands and warm lips told Jake, without words, that he'd won the argument. As he put his arms around her, he thought, "I'm going to have to raise Hell around here more often."

Developments came sooner than Jake expected. Of course he'd been stupid not to think of it, but Barnes couldn't make a move until Jake was silenced. The following day as he sat eating his lunch, cops came pouring in and before he could

struggle to a standing position, had quietly, efficiently started to ransack the place.

"What the Hell is this," Jake yelled, choking on a hard-boiled egg.

"Simmer down, Harlan," the biggest, ugliest one said. "We got a search warrant." Then, in the bored tone of a good cop who has to ask the questions, knowing he'll get stupid answers, anyway, he said, "Or would you rather save time and bother by telling us where it is?"

Jake's rage left him, replaced by fear. He tried not to show it. "Considering that I own the joint, and regardless if you got a warrant or not, I think I got a right to know what the hell this is all about before you finish tearing up the place." He tried to get it all out in one breath and ran down, going from righteous wrath to embarrassing squeak.

"Some guys never learn," the cop muttered. His tone went polite; too polite. "You're right, Mr. Harlan, absolutely right, and I'll tell you what it's all about. It's about a loan company and a guard, Mr. Harlan. The company was heisted and the guard crippled for life by a .38 slug. We don't like anonymous tipsters, Mr. Harlan, but we follow any leads we get, regardless of their source." All sarcasm, he went on, "And now we'll continue this little game and you ask me which loan company and how much they got took for, OK?"

"Nope, I read about it in the papers. Go ahead and search, you won't find anything." Jake tried to look nonchalant, but only succeeded in looking like a guilty man trying to look innocent. Inside, he felt queasy. Framed, by god. Barnes must be back of this; Kathy was right dammit, he should have taken his chances and gone to the cops last night.

They found the money; still in neat bundles held together by green paper bands. The name of the loan company was stamped on each band. Jake never learned how nor when Barnes had hidden it, but that had to be the answer. This was Barnes' insurance in case Jake turned thumbs down on his proposition, so he'd probably taken care of it when he decided to bring Jake in on the racket.

Jake was already on the way to the station, sandwiched between two cops in the back seat of a squad car, when the thought struck him: Oh my God, I can't tell them about Barnes now; they'll think I'm trying to throw up a smoke-screen.

The house and garage went to pay for his defense, but he could just as well have saved his money: Barnes testified that he'd met Jake near the loan company just before the robbery, but hadn't thought anything about it at the time. A sad-looking skid-row derelict said he'd seen a man closely resembling Jake run from the company's office

at the approximate time of the robbery. (His testimony must have cost Barnes at least two bottles of bust-head wine, Jake thought.) The crippled guard, brought in on a stretcher, didn't hurt Jake's chances, but he didn't help them a whole hell of a lot, either: The robber had been of average size, like Jake, but he'd worn a silk stocking over his head and face, so he was all but unrecognizable.

There was other testimony, some good, some bad. Jake's lawyer fought hard, but he was fighting because that was his job and Jake was paying him, not from any belief in his client's innocence.

The jury deliberated a whole hour before finding Jake Harlan "guilty as charged."

Kathy fainted when Jake stood up for sentencing, so she didn't hear the Judge toss away twelve years of his life. She was still out when they led him away.

Prison changed Jake but it wasn't as bad as he'd expected. Probably because of his attitude: to him, prison wasn't an end but an interlude; something he had to sweat out until he was free to kill Ned Barnes. It was simple; when the Judge sent Jake to this hock-shop for twelve years, he had unknowingly, sentenced Barnes to die.

Kathy never missed a visitor's day. She watched, as time and Prison worked their changes in her man. The boyish, indistinct outline

of his face hardened and set, became the face of a man. The grey eyes turned bleak, the mouth thinned. Actually, though it took Kathy a long time to realize it, the change in his face was for the better: from a feminine viewpoint he could be considered handsome.

At Kathy's every visit Jake picked up gossip for the mental dossier he was keeping on his man. From her he learned of Barnes climb up the promotion ladder; to Sgt.; then as time passed, to Lt. of Detectives. She told him of Barnes' marriage, of the birth of his child, a boy. Jake was careful never to let her know of his plans. If she got the slightest inkling that he was planning a murder, there'd be hell to pay; and Jake wasn't going to be sidetracked by anyone, not even Kathy. If he got away with it they could go away and start over; if not, well, that was in the cards.

During her last visit before Jake's release, she mentioned that she was working at a drive-in a couple of blocks from Barnes' new home. Jake tensed inside, but his face remained blank.

"Oh? Where's this?" His voice carried exactly the right amount of don't-give-a-damn. But he learned the location of the house.

It was also during Kathy's last visit that he convinced her not to meet him at the prison. "I want to come back alone, baby, like a man that's free." He frowned, concentrating. "Dammit, Kathy, I can't

explain it. Look, we'll have a lot of years together, let me have this one thing. Instead of taking a sick man back, let a healthy man come back to you."

To his surprise, the last sentence convinced her. "Alright, darling." She looked at him happily. "Don't get lost on the way. Twelve years is a long time to wait." She blushed and giggled.

"Take a week off from your job," Jake grinned, "you'll need at least that long."

It was midnight when the bus pulled into the station and the sleepy passengers started, as if from habit, to push and elbow their way out. When the last one was clear Jake strolled into the station restaurant for coffee.

He meant to get a look at Barnes' home before this night was over. Dangerous? Sure. Stupid, too. He didn't stand a chance of accidentally walking into the perfect situation to kill Barnes and get away clean. That would take planning. But no one had ever accused Jake Harlan of being overly smart, and he was going to get a look at that house. He paid the tired waitress for his coffee and left.

Anticipation and the long walk had him keyed-up, nervous. Nearing the imposing, two story home with well kept lawn and shrubs, he instinctively hugged the shadows, checking avenues of escape. This was going too far. Maybe he'd bet-

ter get back to town and think this over.

"Yeah, I'll go on back, till I come up with a plan." He edged closer.

A small ray of light, shining through an improperly closed blind, drew him like a magnet. Bent double, hardly daring to breathe, he peered through the opening—and froze, surprised delight on his face.

Inside, Detective Lt. Ned Barnes and wife were having a whopper of a family scrap. Barnes, older and heavier than Jake had expected, sat in an overstuffed chair, chastened and resigned. His wife, negligee hanging carelessly open and nothing underneath, stood over him.

"Damn you, Ned," She was hollering, "I'll ruin you."

"But Myra, I told you—" Barnes started.

"Yeah, you told me," she interrupted. "Business. It was business. Ha. With that cheap tramp. I warn you, Ned." The screech went up an octave. "I'll ruin you if I ever see you with that witch again."

Barnes wasn't a cop now, but a thoroughly cowed husband. "Myra, will you listen to reason?"

His words set off another tirade of invective from his wife. She raved on, face livid, cords in her neck standing out starkly.

Outside, Jake grinned with unholy glee. "Maybe I oughta let the bastard live," he thought, "A show like this is almost worth it."

Barnes was pacing the floor, occa-

sionally trying to get in a word past his wife's chatter. He didn't stand a chance. Cursing, he grabbed his hat and coat and started towards the door.

"And just where do you think you're going?" screamed Mrs. Barnes, wrapping both hands around his big arm.

"Out," hollered Barnes. "Out to a boiler factory or a mad-house, where I can have peace-and-quiet."

Her hand went up to his face, raked down, leaving four dark furrows oozing blood. He hit her then; hard, flush on the chin. Both feet left the floor, she landed shoulders first, and lay still. Barnes knelt, hand on her breast feeling for a heartbeat. Nodding, satisfied, he rushed out to his car and sped away, tires throwing gravel, engine roaring, fleeing as if from a devil. He was.

Chuckling silently, Jake turned to go, then stopped. Of course; he didn't want to kill the detective, there was a better answer. He walked quietly, naturally, into the house and knelt beside the now semi-conscious Myra Barnes.

Jake said, "I hate to do this, baby. We're almost on the same side."

He put his work hardened hands around her throat and slowly, as if trying to be very gentle, choked her to death.

Jake and Kathy followed the trial in the newspapers.

"Yes," said Barnes' son. "Mommy

and Daddy woke me up, yelling at each other. No, I didn't hear anyone else in the house."

"Yes," said the Desk-Sgt. "The Lt. came in that night for some Iodine. He had scratch marks on his cheek. No, he didn't try to explain, nor did I ask."

"Yes," said the Medical examiner. "She had shreds of flesh under her fingernails. Yes, they matched the flesh on her husband's face."

The morning that Ex-Lt. Ned Barnes was sentenced to thirty years for the murder of his wife, Jake and Kathy boarded a bus for the west coast, a new-start-in-life look in their eyes.

As she slid into a seat next to a

window, Kathy said "See, silly, after all these years his sins caught up with him, and without any help from you." She moved closer to him and took his big hand in both of her small ones.

"You know, Jake," she said, "for a long time I was afraid you were going to try to kill him when you got out of prison. Now, aren't you glad you didn't?"

"I sure am, Honey, I sure am," Jake said.

Jake Harlan relaxed in the soft, reclining seat as the big, blue and white bus reached the edge of town and picked up speed, heading West. . . .



# after the fact

A  
MANHUNT  
CLASSIC

BY  
HAROLD Q. MASUR

*The store hired Scott Jordan to reclaim ten thousand dollars worth of jewelry from the beautiful, smouldering red-head. The job was ridiculously easy.*



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ON FIFTH AVENUE it's Tiffany's or Cartier's. But they haven't got all the carriage trade sewed up. There's Sutro's on Madison. Not quite as large, but just as elegant, with a liveried doorman at the entrance.

He bowed and smiled and pulled the heavy plate-glass door wide open.

A floorwalker in morning coat and oxford trousers showed me his teeth. "Can I help you, sir?"

"Mrs. Brownlee," I said.

His deference expanded. You might think I had asked for the Duchess of Luxemburg. "The elevator on your left, sir. Third floor."

He gave me a personal convoy past the blond wood display counters in front of which set gracefully carved chairs with black patent leather seats. The rose-colored broadloom underfoot was soft as grass. The indirect lighting was subdued and easy on the eyes.

The sales personnel were distinguished-looking and impeccably

garbed, supplied with smooth-writing fountain pens to facilitate the writing of checks, on the theory that few people carried enough cash to pay for the original designs executed by Sutro's own artisans.

An angular female sat at a reception desk on the third floor. She raised an inquiring eyebrow as I approached.

"Mrs. Brownlee," I said.

"Have you an appointment?"

"At two o'clock."

She checked her wrist watch and looked up disapprovingly. "It's five after."

"Sorry," I said. "It's that Turkish ambassador. He always dawdles over his schnapps."

She glared at me. "Your name, please."

"Jordan," I said. "Scott Jordan."

She plugged into a small PBX and spoke my name, listened, got me the green light, and pointed to a door against the far wall.

It was quite an office, very sumptuous, with a wide expanse of desk fashioned out of English walnut and polished like a mirror. A woman stood up from behind the desk. "Scott Jordan," she said warmly, and came around to greet me.

"Hello, Eve."

At forty, Eve Brownlee was a tall, sinewy, well-nourished woman with dark hair pulled severely back from a pale forehead. In a tailored suit, with the bloom of youth gone, she could still activate the hormones, and there was no doubt that she had

a lot of enthusiastic mileage left.

She owned Sutro's. She inherited the establishment when her first husband, Jacques Sutro, carelessly stepped out into the path of a Fifth Avenue bus. She had mourned briefly and then gone to work learning the business.

I had met her a year ago in Mexico, while her second husband, Charles Brownlee, was on a fishing trip. They had been secretly married, she confided, and were spending their honeymoon. When she called me this morning I had no idea what was on her mind.

She got me seated and came straight to the point. "You're still practicing law, I suppose?"

"Vigorously."

"Can you handle a problem for us?"

I shrugged noncommittally. "Depends on the problem."

"Have you ever heard of Joyce Arnold?"

I thought and shook my head.

"Then let me enlighten you." Eve put her fingertips together. "Joyce Arnold is a character. Good family and good background. Her father is in the diplomatic service, vice-consul somewhere in the Balkans. But the girl never settled down. She was briefly headed for a career. Studied law and even practiced for a time. She was married twice and divorced twice. About a month ago she came into the store and—"

Eve glanced up as the door opened.

A man's voice spoke apologetically. "Didn't know you had company, Eve. I'm sorry."

"That's all right, Charles. I want you to meet Scott Jordan, the attorney I told you about. This is my husband, Charles Brownlee."

I saw a tall gent with an aristocratic air, straight and thin, with a touch of gray at the temples. He reached for my hand with a grip like a pipefitter in good shape.

Brownlee had been employed at Sutro's for several years before marrying the boss. Marriage had moved him up the ladder. He was general manager now.

Eve said, "I was just telling Scott about Joyce Arnold."

He looked at her with a pained expression, frowning. "You're not really going to sue that girl, are you, Eve?"

"Why not?"

"Because I'm not sure it's the wise thing to do."

"Look, Charles, we've got to run this firm on a business basis, not as a philanthropic institution."

He shook his head stubbornly. "But there must be some other method."

"What, for instance?"

"Give me time and I'll think of one."

"Time? Haven't we waited long enough? Suppose we let Scott decide." She appealed to me. "Here's the situation. It's simple enough. As I was saying, Joyce Arnold came in to the store some time ago, six weeks

to be exact. She was looking for a piece of jewelry. Nothing pleased her until she saw a certain pin, rather expensive diamonds and emeralds, but she couldn't make up her mind, so Charles let her take it home, sort of on consignment. We do that with certain customers. Gives them a chance to reach a definite decision. That was six weeks ago. The pin is worth ten thousand dollars. She has neither paid for it nor returned it."

"Have you communicated with her?"

"By mail and telephone. She ignores the letters and acts evasive on the telephone. It's a ridiculous situation and I can't understand it at all," Eve said indignantly.

"Did she sign a receipt?"

"Of course."

I took it from her hand and looked it over. Everything was in order, ironclad and legal.

Brownlee cleared his throat. "What do you suggest, counselor?"

"You have one of two remedies. An action to make her pay or an action to recover the merchandise. Providing you want to sue."

Eve looked first at her husband, then at me. "Is there any other way, Scott?"

"Maybe we can settle out of court. I usually try to do that first."

"You have our authorization."

"That all right with you, Mr. Brownlee?"

"Er—yes," he said absently. "Whatever you think best."

"Then it's settled."

We exchanged some small talk, shook hands all around, and I left.

Joyce Arnold lived in Gracie Square. The building was old, but well-kept and respectable. I got her apartment from the row of mail boxes and took the self-service elevator to the fourth floor.

I had a hunch. My hunch said that Joyce Arnold no longer had the pin, that it was in hock, that she couldn't raise the money to redeem it, and that she was stalling for time.

I found the number and rang the bell.

The door opened. She stood, blocking the threshold, not too tall, not too short, just right, gorgeously bunched and full of electricity. Her face was oval-shaped and olive-skinned, with large moist expressive eyes under flaring brows. Bronzed hair lounged softly around her shoulders. Her lips were cherry-red, luscious and desirable. The rest of her looked damned good too.

On business calls, I'm usually immune. But this was too much for me. My chest was thumping.

"Miss Arnold?" I said.

"Yes."

"The name is Jordan—Scott Jordan. I'd like to talk to you. I'm an attorney."

"Attorney for whom?"

"Sutro's."

I had my foot wedged in to prevent the slamming door from flattening my nose. It didn't slam and

I got my first surprise of the afternoon. She smiled. It was a smile that promised a man the world, but he'd probably have to pay for it at current real estate values.

She stepped aside. "Come in, won't you?"

I went through a foyer and down two steps into a sunken living room. Upholstery on the love seat had a busy circus design. The wingback chairs were peppermint-striped in green and red. Plaster of Paris animals stood, sat, and reclined from every horizontal shelf in the place.

Joyce Arnold sank back into a nest of pillows on the love seat and tucked her legs up under her. "I've read about you, Mr. Jordan. This is a pleasure, indeed. I'm delighted." She patted the seat beside her. "Sit down."

The space was just wide enough for a golf stick. I took a deep breath and squeezed in. It reminded me of the subway at rush hours. My pulse began to knock erratically.

First honors to Miss Arnold.

Her strategy was effective. How can you think straight against the pressure of molded thigh and the swirling fragrance of recently shampooed hair and sea-blue eyes deep enough to drown in?"

"You say you're from Sutro's?" The diction was Knob Hill but the tone was Basin Street.

"That's right," I said.

"A lovely store."

"Yes, ma'am."

I was real bright this afternoon.

I shook my head. I avoided her eyes. I put some steel into my voice.

"I understand you were a lawyer once, Miss Arnold."

"Still am. I've never been disbarred. Just inactive."

It was a big mistake. She never should have given it up. Only a jury of blind octogenarians with muscular atrophy would decide a case against her.

"Then you must know something about the law," I told her. "There are certain tenets concerning fraud, illegal possession, and unjust enrichment. You know why I'm here. About that pin you took from Sutro's. It doesn't belong to you. Not yet. Title remains vested in Sutro's until it's paid for. They are very adamant. They believe you've had enough time to decide. They want their money or their pin. The management has empowered me to take whatever steps I find necessary to accomplish that end."

"Did Charles Brownlee send you here?"

"The idea was Mrs. Brownlee's."

"So they're going to sue," she said. "I can't believe it."

"Come now, Miss Arnold," I said. "Six weeks is a long time. Ten thousand dollars is a lot of money. A thing like this can't go on indefinitely. They're afraid you'll get squatter's rights. Certainly you've had enough time to make up your mind."

"I have, Mr. Jordon." She nodded decisively. "I'm keeping the pin."

"Good," I said. "Suppose you make out a check and give it to me."

She sniffed. "I'll have to sell some stock and make a deposit. They'll have a check in the mail not later than tomorrow afternoon."

"That's a promise?"

"Yes."

I held out my hand. "Shall we seal it?"

It wasn't her way of closing a deal. She had other ideas. She turned sideways and tilted back into my arms. Her fingers squirmed along the back of my neck, pulling me close. Her lips were cushion-soft and pouting. I didn't have to move more than half a millimeter to make contact.

I held back a moment. Nothing here seemed disloyal to my clients. She had promised to pay. The case was closed. Ostensibly, I was on my own.

I moved the half a millimeter. It was something. Have you ever been caught in the propwash of a B-29? Her mouth opened on mine, hungry and lingering. Her fingernails gouged into the nape of my neck. She made a small whimpering savage noise and the thing got out of hand. I felt myself spinning and whirling into a vortex that left me dizzy and breathless.

The spinning stopped, and only a white heat remained, and it tried to burn a hole in the pit of my stomach. The heat moved to her mouth then, and her lips were on fire, and she squirmed closer in my arms,

pressing the length of her body against mine. In less than ten seconds, the whole room was a blazing holocaust and we were in the middle of it, and we didn't give one little damn.

We rested for a while after that and we didn't say much. There wasn't much else we could say. And then that hungry look came into her eyes again, and she moved closer to me again, and I was getting ready for another three-alarmer, because these were fires I liked.

So the damn doorbell picked that precise moment to start ringing.

At first, she ignored it. But an insistent finger kept the button depressed. It took will-power, but I finally got her disengaged. She moved away from me and stood up, straightening her dress. Her eyes were muddy and her lipstick smeared. When her breathing slowed down she said, "Don't go way now," and disappeared into the foyer.

I heard the door open. I heard her gasp of surprise. "Gladys!"

The visitor's voice was harsh and strained. "I must speak to you, Joyce."

"Some other time, Gladys. I'm very busy. Can we have cocktails tomorrow at—"

"No. It won't wait. I have to see you now."

The voice had resolution and inflexibility. I knew the visitor was coming in. I felt foolish sitting there with lip-rouge all over my face. I

got out of the love seat and through a swinging door into a tiny kitchen just as Joyce Arnold backed up into the living room. I kept the door open a quarter of an inch.

No wonder Joyce had backed up. Gladys had both the vigor and the physique. She was built like one of those showgirls Ziegfeld used to hire in the old days to stand around in a tassel and smile for the stimulation of jaded executives and visiting firemen. A tall, statuesque, peroxide blonde, full blown, pneumatic and boiling mad.

She put her hands on her hips and made her lips thin. Her eyes were ominous. "You listen to me, Joyce, and get this straight. I'm warning you. Stay away from Matt. Understand? Stay away from Matt."

"What's the matter with you?"

"He's my husband and he's going to stay my husband."

"Who wants him?"

"You do. You've been seeing him."

Joyce managed a laugh. "You've got the wrong number, Gladys. I wouldn't take Matt on a silver platter."

"Then why have you seen him?"

"Business. Strictly business. Matt Frost and I were once associated, weren't we?"

"You mean you worked for him."

I thought, Matt Frost. That would be Mathew B. (for Blackstone) Frost. A well-known legal-beagle with offices on Foley Square. A short bald pudgy specimen with

a devious brain and an active practice in matrimonial actions.

I saw the peroxide blonde take a threatening step. "This is my last warning, Joyce. If you don't leave him alone, so help me, I'll kill you."

Joyce Arnold held her ground. "He's all yours. I never wanted him and I don't want him now. Will you please leave?"

Gladys concentrated a glare of pure unadulterated hatred. If looks could kill, Joyce would have been horizontal on the carpet, stone cold dead. The blonde turned suddenly and marched through the foyer. The whole apartment trembled with the impact of the door when it slammed shut.

I stepped out of the kitchen.

Joyce heard me. "Oh, there you are." She dropped onto the love seat, sighing. "Come over and sit down."

Damned if she didn't want to resume where we'd left off as if nothing had happened.

I lit a cigarette. "That blonde," I said, "was really sore."

"You got an earful, didn't you?"

"How could I help it?"

"Well, she was mistaken."

I shook my head. "First time I ever heard of two women fighting over Mathew Blackstone Frost."

She narrowed her eyes. "You know Matt Frost?"

"Business-wise, not socially."

Joyce bent over and reached for a box of cigarettes on the coffee table. I struck a match and brought the flame close. She filled her lungs

with smoke and kept it there. Then she leaned back and half closed her eyes. "Know who Gladys used to be?" she asked.

"Who?"

"The first Mrs. Charles Brownlee."

I almost dropped my cigarette.

"You don't say."

"We got her the divorce. I was associated with Matt when he handled the case."

"So the lawyer married his client," I said.

"It's not the first time."

"She had blood in her eyes. Better watch out, Joyce."

She shrugged indifferently. Twin streams of smoke leaked through her nostrils. "I'm not worried. Come over here and sit down."

I looked at my watch and started to get up. "By God, it's late," I said, "and I've got an appointment with a judge."

She was pouting. "You really have to go?"

"It's very important."

"Will I see you again?"

"Sure."

"Tonight?"

"Why not?"

"Come for supper," she said. "You'd be surprised. I can cook."

You're always cooking, I thought. "It's a date," I said.

She got up and moved to a liquor cabinet. "One for the road?" she asked.

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

She was trying her luck on a shot of Black Horse when I left. Halfway down the hall I thought of something and tiptoed back. Her voice came through in a monologue. She was talking to someone on the telephone.

“. . . it's Eve Brownlee, I tell you. She's impatient. I promised the lawyer I'd send a check. We'll have to figure something, Matt. Can I see you?" A pause. "Yes, I'll be here all afternoon if you call back."

I didn't hear the handset click into its cradle. But the monologue was suspended. I hurried to the elevator.

I called Sutro's from my office. "Eve," I said, "I spoke to Joyce Arnold. She promised to mail us a check tomorrow afternoon."

"Scott, you're a genius."

"Hold on," I said. "She made the promise, not me. I don't know if she'll keep her word."

"And if she doesn't?"

"Then we'll sue."

"It's in your hands, Scott."

"Good enough."

I stayed at my desk and worked all afternoon, correcting syntax on a brief for the Appellate Division. Then I went home for a shave, a shower, and a complete change. At seven o'clock I headed for Gracie Square.

The self-service elevator took me up.

I put my finger on the buzzer. She was probably in the tiny kitchen. Those pressure cookers usually

make a lot of noise. Nobody answered. I rattled the knob and the door swung open easily.

I went in and I saw her.

No wonder she couldn't hear me. She was through hearing anything, ever again. The one bullet was enough. It had knocked in the left temple and she sat sprawled awkwardly in the peppermint-striped chair. Her wide open eyes were fixed on the high ceiling, blank and glassy.

Her body looked unreal. Too theatrical. As if it were planned for effect.

I stood there, rooted, impaled to the floor. For once I was really shocked.

Eight thousand homicides every year. You read about them in the papers. But you feel nothing, neither pity nor shock. The victims are merely names, unfamiliar ciphers. It's different when you've known a girl, held her in your arms, felt her heart beating.

Joyce Arnold had come a long way. I knew she'd hurried getting there. Was it worth the effort?

What had she done? Taken another woman's husband? Tried to make an easy buck? Maybe it was a combination of both.

My lips were cotton dry as I reached for the phone and called Headquarters. Detective-lieutenant John Nola was the man I wanted. Sometimes he knew just what to do.

"Stay there," he told me grimly.

"You know the procedure."

"I knew what he meant. He meant: Hands off. This is murder and out of your jurisdiction. Keep your nose clean. Don't get a finger caught.

I knew what he meant all right. So I started to search. I wanted to be sure we got a receipt for a diamond pin if it was here anywhere. Not that I didn't trust the cops. But there's bound to be one rotten apple in a whole barrel. One cop with an itchy palm. I looked in the kneehole desk, in the closets in the bureau drawers. For a while I thought it was gone.

I found the envelope hidden under a tangle of nylon hosiery and undergarments. The flap was open and I looked inside.

It held some newsprint and a photostat.

The newsprint was a page torn out of the Law Journal and dated April 1st. A pencil mark encircled an item. It stated that an interlocutory decree had been entered in the divorce action of Brownlee vs Brownlee. The article went on in dry legal phraseology.

That was the split, I guessed, between Gladys and Charles.

The photostat was a copy of the marriage certificate issued to Charles Brownlee and Eve Sutro on June 20th in Gretna Green. It showed that a ceremony had been performed by a Justice of the Peace the same day.

I looked them over, thinking

hard. The answers hit me like a Mack truck. I got out of there as fast as I could.

A police siren came wailing through the night as I reached the corner. Brakes squealed in protest. I didn't wait around.

I stepped hurriedly into the drug store and thumbed through the telephone directory. It supplied the home address of Gladys and Mathew B. Frost.

They lived on Park Avenue, only five blocks away. I went up there and I pushed the button. A tiny French maid with a capricious smile opened the door and twinkled. "Yes, m'sieu?"

"Mrs. Frost, please."

"She ees not home."

"Mr. Frost?"

"He ees with her. Can I so something for you, m'sieu?"

She sure could, but not now. Not if she was going to do it right.

I headed over to the West Side. To Riverside Drive and one of those concrete monoliths with an acre of window panes facing the Hudson. Charles and Eve Brownlee had a terrace apartment high up in the north tower.

They were home, dining at opposite ends of a long table under a glittering chandelier. Everything had been cleared away except a silver coffee service.

Eve delicately touched a napkin to a corner of her mouth. "Cup of coffee, Scott? Sorry we can't offer dessert. We're on a diet."

"Nothing, thanks," I said.

Charles Brownlee patted his satisfied stomach. "Eve tells me you've settled the case, counselor. Extraordinary. With a talent like that you ought to run a collection agency." He took a sip of coffee. "You say we can expect our money tomorrow or the day after?"

"Not any more," I said. "You'll have to wait."

"But I thought . . ." He looked at his wife with a puzzled expression and then came back to me. "Wait for what?"

"For her estate to be settled."

"Estate?"

"That's right. She's dead."

They goggled at me, their eyes round and stunned. Eve gasped. "What . . ."

"Shot," I said, "in the head. And very very dead."

Charles Brownlee got his mouth closed.

"When?"

I stood up and looked down at him. "You tell me."

"I—*what's that?*"

"You tell me," I said. "When was she killed?"

A muscle jumped in his throat. The iron gray brows came together in a wavering line over the bridge of his jutting nose.

He said hoarsely, "I'm afraid I don't understand what you're talking about."

"Like hell you don't!" I said. "Maybe you didn't check the time on your watch, but you can make a

pretty good guess. Go ahead and try."

He didn't say a word. His throat seemed stuck. There was a sudden withdrawal reflected in the opaque shine of his eyes. They seemed to go dead and dull.

"Go on, Brownlee," I said. "Tell us. When did you put that bullet through her head?"

"No!" Eve half screamed. She was out of her chair, fingers clutching her throat, pop-eyed with fear. "What in the world are you trying to say?"

I spoke to her, but my eyes stayed on him.

"It was I who found her, Eve. Dead in her own apartment. I disobeyed police orders, searching for the pin. I found something else instead. A clipping from the Law Journal with the date of his interlocutory decree from Gladys. April 1st."

Brownlee found his tongue. "So what?"

"There was another paper." I told him. "It showed that you were married to Eve on June 15th."

He snorted. "Everybody knows that."

"I'm afraid not. The fact is you kept your marriage secret. I met Eve in Mexico and she told me. A good thing, too, or you might have landed in jail."

"Jail?" Eve's voice was a shredded whisper, barely audible. Her face was drawn.

"Exactly. It takes ninety days for

an interlocutory decree to become final in this state. He was taking no chances. You were ready to marry him and he struck while the iron was hot. He took you off to Maryland and an obscure Justice of the Peace. It was his idea to keep it secret, wasn't it, Eve?"

I could tell from her expression it was true. Her face was lined and old. Her usual poise was completely gone.

"He failed to comply with the law," I said. "A man is not fully divorced until his decree is final. That made his second marriage illegal and exposed him to a charge of bigamy."

Eve steadied herself against a chair. She could barely get the words out. "You say he killed Joyce. Why would he do that?"

"Because she suspected and made it her business to collect the evidence. Brownlee was a director of Sutro's now and ripe for a show-down. She had some help, I'll bet, from Mathew Frost. I think Frost suggested the jewelry angle. It was a little neater than outright blackmail. They were sure Brownlee would never really go after the money. Joyce Arnold had braced him and showed him her ace in the hole. That's why he was so reluctant to sue. They felt he'd pay the bill himself first."

Eve looked as if she were bleeding to death inside. "I—I can't believe it . . ."

"Look at him," I said. "The guilt

is there in his face, written for anyone to see. My guess is he just didn't have enough cash on hand to pay the tab. I'm sorry, Eve, but it was you who brought matters to a head by calling me in on the case. Charles couldn't pay and Joyce wouldn't. He knew she'd spill the story if we pressed her. There was only one way out. Joyce had to die. That's why he went to see her this afternoon. To eliminate a threat that could topple him from his nice new position. After all, he might inherit the store someday."

Brownlee's temples were shining, wet with moisture.

"You'll never be able to prove it," he said hoarsely.

"Maybe not," I said, "Providing nobody knows you left the store. Providing nobody saw you in the vicinity of Miss Arnold's apartment. Although the cops are pretty thorough. They'll check and recheck for witnesses. And how about the gun? Did you get rid of it, Brownlee? If it's hidden here in the apartment, they'll find it. They know how to take a place apart piece by piece. You won't—"

That tore it. He knew when the game was lost. He heaved from the table, moving with incredible speed, and lunged frantically through the door.

I took after him. He raced down the corridor and whirled into another room. The door slammed shut as I landed against it. A key turned in the lock.

"Brownlee!" I yelled, banging against it with my fist. Inside a drawer pulled open. I backed up and lunged. The wood held, but it sprung the lock.

I tumbled through the door.

He had the gun out now. I stopped short when I saw it and tried to reverse my field. But it wasn't revenge he was after. It was escape.

His wild eyes covered the room frantically, like a cornered animal looking for a hole in the woodwork. In just a few seconds he would begin to realize where his escape lay, and then the gun would begin blasting at me.

I didn't care to wait that long. I threw a long flying tackle at him that brought him down like a broken stick. He tried to bring the gun up, but his jaw collided with my bunched fist, and his hand opened, dropping the gun onto the floor.

His mouth opened, too, wide, and he lay stretched out like a Maltese Cross, as silent as a snuffed out candle.

I stood up, and then looked down at him, relaxed now in unconsciousness. I thought briefly of the agony a trial would cause Eve, and I almost wanted to pick up the gun and save the state an expense.

It took a lot of effort to turn away.



# TENNIS



# UM

*He was an "almost" champion. He had the forehand and the backhand . . . but the winning hand eluded him.*

**BY G. L. TASSONE**

**M**RS. MILBURN'S view from her third floor apartment in the Hallman Arms is excellent. She has a clear unobstructed view of the lake and of the Milburn Racquet and Yacht Club which is sprawled out below her and borders the lake on six acres of very valuable property.

Being an invalid, Mrs. Milburn spends a great deal of time at her living-room window contemplating the blue-beauty of the lake and

watching the tennis players perform beneath her in the sun.

The Milburn Racquet and Yacht Club was named after its founder and principal benefactor, John R. Milburn. The Club consists of six outdoor courts and three indoor, a swimming pool, and a large, white sprawling clubhouse, complete with dining-room and bar. There is also a dock which fingers out into the lake to which both power and sailboats are anchored.

Occasionally, Mrs. Milburn, since her husband's death no one seems to call her Sara anymore, has her chauffeur, Ramsey, take her over to the Club so that she can visit with the other members and so that she can get a closer look at the players.

Before her accident, Sara Milburn was a tennis player, never a good one, but a fair club-player, and even after she became an invalid she still retained her interest in the game of tennis. It was through her doing that one of the brighter lights of the tennis-world was brought to Milburn to serve as the Club-Professional.

When Barry Cole accepted the offer of the position at Milburn he was tired of tournament-tennis. He had followed the tennis-trails from Forest Hills to Wimbledon. He had been up and down the coast of California so many times that even the beauties of that sprawling state had begun to pale for him.

Barry Cole had become a top-flight tennis player in a roundabout way. When he was five-years old, his Father threw him into a pool to teach him to swim. Barry was retrieved from the water, almost dead, by an exasperated lifeguard who happened to notice his pathetic struggles. From that moment, Barry feared and hated water.

It was Barry's luck that he was born and raised only a quarter-mile from the Pacific Ocean. The rest of the children in the neighborhood

spent their summers at the beach enjoying their youth on the edge of that blue expanse of water. Barry, to escape, spent his time at the public tennis courts only two blocks from his home.

Barry began to go to the tennis courts when he was six years old. That first year, it was difficult for him to find anyone to play with. With most of the other children at the beach, Barry left for the courts each morning shortly after dawn. Barry used the practice board by the hour. He knew that his fear extended in the direction of the beach and that danger waited for him there at the water's edge. He spent hour after hour of summer-morning-volleying, knowing, as he relentlessly battered that ball at the board that this was a *place* to be, a *time* to be occupied, and as the morning wore toward noon and he watched the other children walk toward the beach he was grateful that he had this place and that he need not go with them.

By the following summer, the tennis courts were no longer just an excuse. Barry grew to love the game—the feel of the ball against his racquet, the clean arc of his forehand, feeling the power of an overhead smash extend from his racquet to his arm and down into the trunk of his young body, he knew that tennis was going to be his life.

Soon, everyone in Goodrich Falls knew that young Barry Cole was a

tennis-dynamo. By the time Barry was thirteen, his serve, a white shocking-blur, was more than anyone in town could handle. Mr. Stanley, the high-school tennis coach knew that he had a potential star. Barry won the State Junior title that year and the year after that. At the age of fifteen he won both the Junior title and the State Men's Singles, the first time that a Junior ever accomplished the feat in the state of California.

After that, Barry became the pampered-darling of the tennis world. He grew up into a very handsome young man. He had light, sandy hair that covered his head in a casual manner and he had the deepest blue eyes that any girl had ever seen. His body grew straight and strong and he was always a deep bronze from the sun. His deep blue eyes smiled constantly in his handsome young face and he felt that the world was his for the taking.

Barry Cole never did take the world, simply because he was never able to win a major-championship. He was a winner many times but he was never able to win a "big-one". He won tournaments too numerous to mention, but Forest Hills, Wimbledon, when the stakes ran high, he didn't have it. Barry was twenty-eight before he would admit that he would never make the really big-time, and when the offer for the job at Milburn came he accepted it.

Barry had been at Milburn a little over a month when Sara Milburn entered his life. From the beginning, Barry enjoyed the job at Milburn. He enjoyed teaching the youngsters that showed up every afternoon for lessons. He used the mornings to stay in shape in case he ever decided to play tournament tennis again. He would get up shortly after dawn and run along the lake. There was a path for bicycles and horses that ran along the lake's edge. Barry ran along this path, seldom looking at the lake's blue, because water still bothered him, but he ran head down with the long easy strides of the athlete. He could feel the strength in his legs and his breathing was easy and deep. He ran past the Club's private beach, past the boat dock that stretched out into the water, a mile or so down the path and then back again.

After his morning run, Barry was back at the Club for a shower and breakfast and then a set with one of the Club's members. For the first time in years he was beginning to enjoy the feel of the racquet in his hand again. He was glad to see new faces and hear new voices. He was beginning to forget the tournaments he had lost. He was beginning to lose the fears and doubts that had gnawed at him the last few years because he hadn't been able to win a major tournament, and he was beginning to feel his youth and his confidence return.

Coming off the court one Tuesday afternoon, after just giving his last lesson of the day, Barry noticed a man standing on the sidelines in a chauffeur's uniform. The man came toward Barry as he walked off the court.

"Excuse me, Mr. Cole, my name is Ramsey, I'm Mrs. Milburn's chauffeur. Mrs. Milburn asked me to deliver a message. She would like to know if it would be possible to see you this evening? At her place, on a matter about the Club."

Barry wiped his face with a towel. "I suppose so. I don't have anything planned. Yes, you can tell her that I'll be there."

"Fine, Sir. It's right across the street in the Hallman Arms. Should I say, eight o'clock?"

"Yes, I'll be there at eight o'clock," Barry answered.

Barry had dinner at the Club. He had taken a steam-bath and a rub-down and he felt completely relaxed as he stood before the door of Mrs. Milburn's apartment. He was dressed in a blue sport-coat, gray-flannel slacks, white shirt with button-down-collar, and a dark blue tie. He felt very good. His skin felt taut and very clean and his legs were strong from his morning runs and his stomach muscles felt hard and firm.

The Milburn maid answered the door. She ushered Barry through a small vestibule and into a large living-room. Mrs. Milburn was sitting at the window, her back to

Barry. The evening twilight filled the room. Mrs. Milburn didn't turn. She was confined to a wheel-chair. Her hair was blue in the evening light and there were silver streaks running through it.

"Mr. Cole," she said, turning her chair, "It was good of you to come. I have been watching the sun set. I do almost every evening. Since my accident I spend much of my time at this window."

Mrs. Milburn was a very handsome woman. Barry had seen her at the Club a few times and had decided that she must be in her forties, but here, she looked younger, perhaps her middle thirties, he thought.

She rolled her chair over to a portable-bar and she said,

"Let me fix you a drink. This is my maid's evening out. She was just leaving when she showed you in. What would you like?"

"Scotch with water, will be fine," he answered.

Mrs. Milburn fixed two drinks and handed one to Barry.

"Won't you sit down. What I have to say won't take long, but it may come as somewhat of a shock."

Barry seated himself on a large, blue divan.

"Mr. Cole, life has taught me to be very frank. When you are my age you realize that people waste too much time with formalities. Pain and confinement have brought me very close to the truth. I have come to realize that the

shortest distance between two points has always been the truth."

It was almost dark in the room now. Barry sipped at his drink.

"For the past month, from this room, I have watched you run almost every morning. In the afternoon I have watched you play or give lessons. You are a beautiful, young man, Mr. Cole. Your body responds with an ease that others can only envy and admire."

Barry settled back on the divan and listened to Mrs. Milburn. He knew that he liked hearing about himself.

"I am forty-seven years old, Mr. Cole. That surprises you, doesn't it?"

"Yes it does," he answered, "You look much younger."

"Doctors have restored youth to my face. But Doctors can only do so much, Mr. Cole. I want what I never had from John, my husband. Mr. Milburn was an old man. He was old twenty-eight years ago when I married him, and he was ancient two years ago when he died. I waited so long for him to die. With John, I had nothing but money. I prayed all during my marriage for him to die. I prayed that he would die before I lost my youth and my beauty, but fate is more than funny, when he finally died, at the age of eighty-four, it was in an automobile accident that crippled me for the rest of my life."

Mrs. Milburn wheeled back to the bar and fixed two more drinks.

She brought a drink to Barry and remained there a foot or so from where he sat staring directly into his blue eyes.

"I want you, Mr. Cole. I want your youth and your sex. I want to know that your strength and your beauty are mine. There is no one to whom I care to leave the Milburn fortune, so it will be yours. You will become the benefactor of my Will. The Milburn fortune will be your's on my death."

Her voice lowered and trembled as she continued, "My spine was injured in the accident that killed my husband. I have less than a year to live. I want the best during that remaining year and I think *you* are the best, Mr. Cole."

Barry remained silent. He wasn't sure as to what he should say. He had been among many older women on the tennis-tour. He had even made love to a few. At times, he had made love out of desire, and once or twice out of curiosity, perhaps even sympathy, but he had never been bought. But even as he was thinking about the past and about Mrs. Milburn's offer he knew that he was going to accept it.

"When will you have the Will drawn up?" He asked.

"Good. I like a man that knows his own mind. I'll have my attorney take care of it first thing in the morning. Everything will be your's at my death. I lived with John for all those terrible years and I earned every cent of the Milburn

fortune. I guess, I can do with it as I want, and what I want is you, Barry."

She turned her chair and wheeled herself toward the bedroom, "Now, let me see if you make love as well as you play tennis."

Barry got up off the divan, finished his scotch, and followed Mrs. Milburn into the bedroom.

Inside of a month, Barry learned to hate Sara Milburn. He hated being seen with her. He hated hearing her voice, but most of all he hated touching her and being touched by her. He found her physical demands on him constant and bordering on the psychopathic. The calm, middle-aged woman that sat and gazed out of her living-room window was trying to make up in a few months time what had been denied her for so many years.

The only thing that kept Barry going was the thought of Sara Milburn's impending death and the realization that he would then have all the money he would ever need. He gave up his early morning runs, instead he now took Sara on early morning walks along the lake. Four or five mornings a week, Barry pushed her chair along the lake's edge. They would walk for an hour or two and then have breakfast together at the Club. During the afternoons she would nap while he gave his lessons and then he had to spend his evenings, every evening, with her.

A few months later, Barry was playing a set with Sara's Doctor. After they had finished playing, Doctor Cunningham invited Barry to have a drink with him. It was during their second drink at the Club bar that Doctor Cunningham brought up the subject of Sara Milburn.

"Barry," he said, "I want you to know, and the other members of the Club have commented on it, that it is really wonderful how you manage to spend so much time with Mrs. Milburn. We all know that her money keeps the Club going, but your morning walks along the lake are really beyond the call-of-duty. I think that it is a wonderful gesture. You'd be amazed at how much her spirits and her condition have improved since you began to spend time with her."

"Thank you, Doctor," Barry said. "By the way, Mrs. Milburn never does talk about her condition. How serious is it? I mean, if I might ask, how much longer does she have?"

Doctor Cunningham looked directly into Barry's eyes.

"I'm afraid, I don't understand. There's no telling how long she has. Except for the injury to her legs, and I doubt that she will ever recover their full use again, her health is very good. She might outlive the both of us."

"You mean, there's nothing wrong with her spine?"

"Her spine was injured. That is

why she is in that cumbersome metal-brace, but I am sure that it will be alright within a year, two at the most. There is nothing terminal about Mrs. Milburn's condition."

Barry finished his drink without tasting it.

"If you'll excuse me Doctor, I have a lesson in about an hour. Thank's for the game and the drink."

Barry left the bar and went to his office.

"The old-bitch," he thought, "So, she might even outlive me. I wonder how long she thought she could have me. Well, we'll see. We'll see."

The next morning Barry picked Mrs. Milburn up at seven o'clock for her stroll along the lake. It was a bright, clear morning. The sun had just broken out over the lake and the water was still and green in the early morning sunlight. The lakefront, except for Mrs. Milburn and Barry, was deserted. Mrs. Milburn was telling Barry what a wonderful person he was and how much he had come to mean to her. As she talked on, Barry wheeled her out onto the dock. The conversation that Barry had had the day before with Doctor Cunningham kept running through his mind. He could still hear the Doctor's voice saying, "She might outlive the two of us."

The lake was very calm. The boats anchored to the dock were lifeless. Barry wheeled Mrs. Mil-

burn toward the end of the dock. The dock, like the Club grounds, was completely deserted. As Barry neared the end of the dock, he didn't stop. Mrs. Milburn didn't notice, she was still talking. She was saying something about buying a boat so they could take early morning cruises around the lake.

Barry, simply wheeled Mrs. Milburn over the end of the dock. It happened so suddenly and so naturally that she didn't even have time to scream. Barry watched the chair splash as it hit the water. He watched both the chair and Mrs. Milburn sink into the quiet of the lake. He recalled his feelings, years before when his Father had thrown him into the water. He shivered with remembered fear. He looked down and he could see Mrs. Milburn struggling on the bottom of the lake. She was in about twenty-feet of water and he watched as she struggled to free herself of the metal-brace that held her trapped to the bottom of the lake.

Barry looked about him—there was no one around. He watched Mrs. Milburn a moment longer. She had given up with the brace and was clawing at the water. She looked like a person trying to struggle her way out of a dream. Barry turned and started back toward the Clubhouse. When he got to the shore he began to run. He wanted to be out of breath when he reported the accident.

Barry knew that it would look

bad for him at the inquest when it came out that he was the sole beneficiary of Mrs. Milburn's Will. He reasoned that his fear of water was common knowledge; it was a sport legend how Barry Cole had turned to tennis because he was afraid to go swimming, so he assumed that it would be understood that he wouldn't have been able to go to Mrs. Milburn's aid.

At the inquest, Barry actually cried when he admitted his cowardice, but he said, that his fear was too old and too deep and though he hated himself for it he just wasn't able to save Mrs. Milburn. He explained that Mrs. Milburn's chair had been on the edge of the dock, he had turned for a moment, and he had heard the chair splash. Whether, she fell accidentally, or was tired of living the life of an invalid, he couldn't say. He preferred to think that it was an accident. He went on to say, that he would always remember her as a woman with a great deal of courage.

Barry decided to remain at Milburn until the Will was probated. After that, he thought that he might travel for awhile, not as a tennis-bum but as a man-of-means-and-leisure.

A few weeks later, he was in his room at the Club reading a magazine article on the advantages of living in tax-free Switzerland, when the phone rang. It was a woman's voice:

"May I please speak to Mr. Cole."

"This is Mr. Cole, speaking."

"Mr. Cole, this is Mrs. Kruger. I don't believe you know me, but I was a good friend of Sara Milburn's. We knew each other for years. I was her neighbor; I lived right above her in the Hallman Arms."

"In what way can I help you, Mrs. Kruger?"

"Well, it's about Sara Milburn's Will. There's something that I am sure you should know. When can I see you?"

"Anytime. How about tomorrow evening?"

"Tomorrow evening will be fine. Make it my apartment at nine o'clock. I am sure that what I have to tell you will interest you very much."

Barry placed the receiver on its cradle. Now what the Hell can she want, he wondered.

The next evening at nine o'clock, Barry was in the elevator at the Hallman Arms.

Mrs. Kruger answered the door. She was older than Mrs. Milburn. She was well into her fifties. Barry saw that no knife had ever worked her face. Her age showed clearly in the wrinkles and creases that betrayed her.

"Come in, Mr. Cole, let me introduce myself. I'm Judith Kruger. As I told you on the phone, I was a very good friend of Sara Milburn's. Did she ever mention me?"

"I don't believe she did," Barry answered.

He followed Mrs. Kruger into her apartment. She led him into the living-room. There was a window with the same view of the Club and the lake.

"Sit down," Mrs. Kruger said, pointing to a large, orange reading-chair. "Can I fix you a drink?"

"Scotch and water will be fine," Barry said, sitting down.

As Mrs. Kruger prepared the drinks, Barry looked about the room. It looked exactly like Mrs. Milburn's apartment except for a screen against one wall and against the opposite wall a movie-projector on a small end-table.

Mrs. Kruger handed Barry his drink.

"I've watched you play tennis many times, Mr. Cole." She was standing next to the fireplace, her drink in her hand. She had on a green silk cocktail dress and her hair was dyed a redish-orange.

"I saw you play last year at Forest Hills. Since my husband's death, I often accompanied Sara when she traveled anywhere. I was a companion to her until you came along. I can't blame her for replacing me with you. I am sure that you were able to do much more for her than I ever was."

Mrs. Kruger sipped at her drink and continued, "You were wonderful at Forest Hills last year."

"Wonderful? I lost in the semi-finals."

"Yes, but you were so majestic in your defeat. Perhaps, that is why

women find you so attractive. You seem to lose better than most men win. You know that women find you attractive, don't you, Barry?"

Barry didn't answer. He knew that sooner or later she would get to the point and tell him why he was there.

She took his drink, "Let me freshen this for you," she said.

When she bent over to take his glass, her décolleté was so low that her soft, flabby, dried breasts were almost completely exposed. The sight of them sickened Barry.

Mrs. Kruger gave him another drink. "You're probably wondering just why I asked you up here?"

"As a matter of fact I am."

"I will get to the point then. Sara Milburn and I were good friends. Sara confided in me. I knew all about your affair. I admired Sara for having the courage to take a young lover, no matter the cost. What good is money if you can't enjoy it? Unfortunately, Mr. Kruger did not leave me so well off. Oh, I have enough money to get by on but there isn't much left over for expensive luxuries."

She put the glass to her lips, drank deeply, and went on.

"From my window, here, I used to watch the two of you going along the lake. How I envied Sara—but to get to the point—my husband's hobby was photography. When he died, I turned to photography to help pass the time. I had all of his equipment and there was

nothing much else for me to do. I have a full reel of you playing tennis. I watch it often. Your body is fascinating. Sara and I used to watch it together. I got a vicarious pleasure out of listening to her talk about you. She went into your affair in detail. But I'm digressing," she reached over and switched out the light.

"Let me show you this film strip and it will explain everything."

Barry heard the projector go on and he watched the screen glare with a silver brightness.

"I took this film from the window. The new Zoom-lense is remarkable. See how clear everything is and it's even self-focusing."

Barry watched himself on the screen. He was playing tennis with one of the members at the Club.

"I took this a few months ago. I like to study your body as well as your tennis style. You really have a beautiful body. I also have quite a collection of pornographic-film that Mr. Kruger left but that can wait until another day."

The scene on the screen cut to a shot of Barry wheeling Mrs. Milburn along the lake.

"This is sometime later. I happened to take this section of film just a few weeks ago. Watch closely, Barry."

Mrs. Kruger didn't have to tell Barry to watch closely. His attention was riveted to the screen. As he watched his image wheel Mrs. Milburn along the lake, he rea-

ized what was coming. It hit him like a physical blow. He watched as he pushed the wheel-chair out onto the dock. He saw himself look around to see if anyone was about and he watched, fascinated, as he walked Sara Milburn off the end of the dock.

There was the slight splash as the chair hit the water. He stood there looking down into the water. Then he walk off the dock. Mrs. Kruger had followed him with her camera as he, finally, broke into a run toward the Clubhouse.

Mrs. Kruger clicked the projector off. The two of them sat there in the dark. Barry could hear his own breathing.

"Before you get any ideas, Barry, my lawyer has a negative of this film. It is to be taken to the District Attorney's Office on my death. I want assurance that you will do every thing possible to prolong my life. I want you to pray for me, daily. You are lucky, I am only fifty-eight and in fairly good health. As soon as you get Sara's money we can travel. It will take us a while to get used to each other but I am sure that we will."

Barry barely heard Mrs. Kruger. He knew what she was saying, but there in the dark, the images of what he had seen on the screen were still running through his mind. He wondered if they would ever stop.

"I will spare you the light, Barry, until you get accustomed to me.

Now come here. It has been a long time for me—long time.”

As though in a trance, Barry got up from his chair. He moved over to the couch. He felt Mrs. Kruger's arms go around him. He was surprised that she had removed her clothes. He felt the loose folds of her flesh and he became nauseous. He felt like a deep-sea diver that has run out of oxygen at the bottom of the sea. He knew that he was going to explode from the

pressure that was building up inside of him. Sharp pains tore through the inside of his head. He was trapped. He felt Mrs. Kruger's wrinkled mouth on his and he let her draw him to her. After all this time, he realized that he was finally drowning. He knew that Barry Cole had never been destined to be a winner. The last thing that he remembered was Mrs. Kruger's voice saying, “Darling, you will have to learn to call me Judy.”





# 27159806  
The Bird Cage  
Brooklyn, New York

Dear Madam Maude,

Thanks and no thanks for the Girl Scout cookies . . . big deal!

Me and Flossie have been reading *Manhunt Magazine*. There's a story about a real up-town floozy who pulls in twenty-five clams a toss. She's a freelance, so she don't have to split with no big-deal madam what can't even spring her own broads. The trouble with you, Maude, is that you ain't got no class. Get a subscription to *Manhunt* and you'll learn a little something about merchandising.

Violet, the matron on Tier 6, sends regards.

Yours truly,  
Ophelia

P.S.

See back cover.

*Krag was a private-eye. He'd been around. But he'd never been in the middle of anything like this.*



*middle-man*

BY RAYMOND CROOKS

ATHENS, New York, didn't resemble Athens, Greece, any more than it did Honolulu, Hawaii; it was a straggle of tenements and railroad yards along the banks of a narrow, turbulent river, with a few grim-looking, old fashioned factories on the side of an overhanging hill, and an outlying section of seventy-year-old mansions where the owners of the factories lived, counted their money, and tried to kid themselves that they were aristocrats. The whole town was owned by a dozen families, and it didn't look as if they worried themselves sick over its appearance. But then, they didn't have to. Nobody came there to study town planning or the five points of 19th century American architecture. There was no tourist season in Athens. I only came there myself to prevent a kid being killed.

The day before, I'd found a letter waiting for me in the office. It was made up of words cut out of a book, possibly a dictionary, and pasted onto a piece of paper. What it said was, "Go to Athens, N.Y. See Henry Jackridge. We have his kid. He will give you ransom. No cops. Work fast, or kid killed day

after tomorrow. You will be watched. This is no bologna."

That was all. No signature, no address, no bologna. So I had gone down to Grand Central with an overnight bag, and hopped a train for Athens, N.Y.

It was a fine day March, sunny, but a little chilly, with the wind sifting dust and old newspapers down the Main street of Athens. The minute I got off the train I knew I was being tailed. The plainclothesmen of Athens police force didn't look like cops, they looked like farmers dressed up for a Saturday night in town. Their shoes squeaked. At least, I knew that this Jackridge had gotten in some law on this case, although I had read nothing of it in the papers. Still, the law can be pretty close-mouthed when they know a kid's life is at stake. That makes them all the madder afterwards, when the money has been paid, the kid returned, and they have five continents in which to look for the kidnappers.

I dropped into a cigar-store, and got Henry Jackridge on the phone and explained who I was. "I got a letter telling me to see you about a family matter," I said.

He caught on quickly.

"Yes, yes, I understand," he assured me. "Come to my house immediately. 22 Livingston Avenue."  
"Oke."

I left the Cigar-store, checked to see that my squeaky-shoed friend was still with me, and looked about for a cab. When I found one, it proved to be a ten-year old Chrysler Imperial that had probably once belonged to one of the aristocrats on the hill. I hopped in and left squeaky-shoes to shift for himself.

We went up to Livingston Ave. The streets, cobble-stoned and dreary, crawled and wound around the granite hills, and the cab did most of its driving in second. The few people I saw in the streets were all leaning forward or backward. Living in this town could become a habit, but not a good one. If you slipped on the ice in winter-time at any point in Athens, you probably wound up cracking your skull against the railroad station down in the valley.

When we were pretty high up, Livingston Avenue became genteel. Shady trees, bare, stony lawns, and, situated at odd angles and several levels, huge gingerbread mansions, built when labor was cheap and taxes were low. A number of them were boarded up, haunted by the ghosts of dead bank-accounts and failing businesses. The Jackridge house was a red-brick affair, bristling with cu-

polas and brown woodwork. It had hell's own amount of steps leading up to it, and looked about as cheerful as a boarding-school for apprentice torturers.

I got out, paid the cabby half his week's wages, and began to fight my way up the steps. It was cold and windy up there, and when I arrived on the veranda I felt that the worst part of this job must surely be over. After those steps the rest would be a cinch.

I was admitted by a decrepit old bird who was only held up by the starch in his shirt, and led into a cozy cavern where three people clung together to keep from getting lost. The decrepit old bird took the breeze after announcing my name, and I wore out some more leather crossing the room to the lonesome three.

They were grouped around a fire-place you could have parked a Cadillac in, two men standing, and one woman sitting. There was a fire, but it didn't even light up the fireplace. The room was vast, shadowy, furnished with what looked like antiques, and chilly.

One of the men said, "Mr. Krag? I'm Henry Jackridge. This is my attorney, Mr. Lovell, and this is my —er—Mrs. Jackridge."

I gave them all a nod. The lawyer looked like a lawyer. Jackridge was fairly tall, well-built, about forty years of age, and as handsome as the law allows. He had light blond hair, and a sort of noble-

looking face, like a matinee idol who has grown up. The only things that spoiled its calm, aloof perfection were the little lines of worry between his eyes, and the tiny network of red arteries in his eye-balls and on his nose and jaw. In that gloom anyone else might not have seen them, but I get paid for seeing things. A noble-looking rummy.

Mrs.—er—Jackridge was good to look at. She was anywhere between thirty and forty, and it didn't matter much just where. She was small, dark-haired, dressed in something dark, simple, and expensive, and she looked the type that would draw whistles at fifty. That is, if you were crude enough to whistle. She had a look of such calm superiority, such inborn good manners, that she could bring out the best in the worst of us. You wouldn't have the nerve to whistle. The heavens would fall and the earth swallow you up if you did. She looked a trifle haggard and worried, as was natural, but you could tell she wouldn't let it get her. Nothing could.

I thought I'd put things straight right from the start. "I'm not in any way connected with the kid-nappers," I said. "I'm a private detective. Why they picked me for go-between I don't know. Probably just got my name out of the phone-book."

"Why didn't they use one of their own gang as a go-between?" Mrs.

Jackridge asked. Her voice was almost a whisper, low and genteel.

"In the first place, it may not be a gang. There may be only one of them, or at most two. If so, they need themselves, or don't trust each other. So they pick a neutral stranger. They can keep an eye on him, without exposing themselves."

"I see," the lawyer said. "Well, Mr. Jackridge received this communication yesterday."

He handed me a paper. It was like the one I'd received, with printed words pasted onto it. They read:

"Man name Krag arrive tomorrow. Give him \$50,000. Tell him leave it at foot of pillar of West Side Highway Manhattan on N.E. corner of 46th St. at 11:30 P.M. Careful. No cops. Give Krag \$200.

"It was mailed from Grand Central."

"Have the cops seen it?" I asked.

"Yes." Jackridge answered. "I asked them to leave it with me. They've checked up on you, and they think we should let you handle it as the kidnapers say."

"You reported to the police as soon as you found the boy missing?"

"Well, soon after. We didn't know he was kidnapped for sure until we got the first letter informing us."

"Weren't you afraid to bring in

the cops? Afraid for the boy's safety—?"

Lovell spoke up. "Kidnapping is a crime, Mr. Krag. To suppress knowledge of a kidnapping is to compound a felony—."

"It was I who informed them," Mrs. Jackridge said. She stood up, and looked me square in the eye. "I love my boy. I want him back safe and sound. He's worth more than \$50,000 to me." Her eyes grew narrow, and she clenched her jaw. "But They'll be caught. I'll see to it. No one can do this to me and get away with it."

"Well, maybe they'll be caught, maybe not. The cops can't act until the boy is returned. By that time the trail can be as cold as a mackerel. However, that's not my business, and the cops wouldn't care for me to act as if it were."

"Precisely," Jackridge said, as if he were glad I took that view of things. "The police agree that we are to give you the money, and that you are to leave it as prescribed in the note. There's really nothing else you need worry about, is there?"

I shrugged. "I guess not. Except my two hundred bucks. I hate to take it, because I feel I'm working more for them than you, but I guess it won't make much of a dent after fifty thousand."

"I guess not," Jackridge said.

\* \* \*

Going down those steps was easier than going up, even toting

50 grand, but I walked all the way to the station without seeing a taxi. It was downhill all the time, and I was winded when I arrived. I spotted at least three guys tailing me, but I didn't give them bad marks. Try tailing someone down-hill some day, and see how good a job you can do. I'd rather do it on horse-back.

It was the screwiest job I'd ever been on. From one point of view it wasn't too bad. Two C's for a day's work, and then I was through, except for the local, state, and FBI boys giving me a couple of goings-over to make me describe every person I'd seen all day long, from New York to Athens and back again. But consider: I'd been forced to do a job I didn't particularly care for. It was the first time I'd ever taken a job for any reason but that I wanted to, and could use the money. Secondly, if I wasn't working for the snatchers, I wasn't working for the Jackridges either. Thirdly, I didn't know who the Jackridges were, when their kid was snatched, what had been done about it, why he referred to her as 'Mrs.—er—Jackridge' why she said 'they can't do this to *me*' instead of 'to *us*'. And I couldn't find out. I couldn't make a false move, or the kidnapers might get scary and scrag the kid. And I was as curious as a cat at a fish-fry. I was in the case one day, and out the next. Nuts. I'd read about it in the papers.

So when I left the fifty grand in a cheap leather brief-case, under the West Side Highway overpass that night, I didn't care who was lurking nearby to grab it, or whether it blew away in the breeze, or if a horse came along and ate it up. I went home to my apartment, mixed a drink, and drank it. Then I went to bed, thought an hour or so, and fell asleep.

Next day, nothing.

The day after, I read all about the case. And it seemed pretty much over. The kid had been found wandering on the George Washington Bridge, with a note in his pocket resembling the other two, giving the kid's name and address. The gang could throw away their dictionary or whatever it was.

I learned plenty that I hadn't known before.

The Jackridges had been divorced a few years back. Incompatibility, or something to that effect. Whether she didn't like the way he went about getting those red lines on his eyeballs, or whether he got them afterward from standing too close to a torch that he might have been carrying since, I didn't know. At any rate, they shuffled the kid between them, a month here, a month there, you know how it goes, and it was while the kid was with Daddy that he was snatched. He was coming home from a birthday party up the block, at 5:00 P.M. when a black Chevrolet sedan pulled up, and a short, grey-haired

man jumped out and grabbed him. He'd been taken for a long ride, and then brought to a dingy room up several flights of stairs. That's the way the kid told it. It had been dark and he'd been scared, but it was obvious he'd been held somewhere in New York City.

There was a lot about me, too. Some of the papers hinted that I was a denizen of the underworld, a shady character, and that I knew more than I would admit. Since I hadn't admitted anything yet, that wasn't so bright.

The law came around for me while I was still reading about it. They were in no great hurry, because they'd probably had me taped ever since I arrived in Athens two days before. The leading singer in the ensemble was an FBI man named Tomlinson, a tall, muscular bird in a tweed suit, who wore horn-rimmed glasses.

They spent two hours going over my life story, and my experiences as a go-between for kidnapers. They didn't hesitate to remind me that as a licensed detective, I was a deputy sheriff of New York County, and that everything from malfeasance in office to high treason would be charged against me if I withheld or distorted the truth.

"You don't have to tell me that," I said. "No private cop can exist without the approval of the police. I know that, and I've never been out of line yet. I didn't ask for this

job, and I only obeyed the instructions of the snatchers because I was afraid of what might happen to the kid. I'm through with the job now, and I'm glad of it. I'll do anything you ask to help catch the lice that did it, but I know nothing more than I've told you."

Tomlinson was pacing the floor of my living room. He stopped, and shrugged. "Okay. I guess you're clean. But remember. You *are* out of it."

"With pleasure."

He sat down again.

Listen, Krag. Let's go into this from another angle. You don't *know* anything but what you've told us. But you're a detective. It's said you're a good one. What do you *think* about this case? What were your impressions of it? Of the people involved?"

I grinned.

"Do you smell a fish?"

"Never mind what I smell. Just tell me what I want to know."

"What do you want to know? The name of the kidnapper? I don't know it. I don't even know what you do know."

He gloomed at me out of those spectacles for a moment, then grinned. "You're a card," he said, and I could tell he really loved me. "But you're not a judge and jury. What did you think of Jackridge?"

"What do you want me to do? Frame Jackridge? I thought he was nice fellow whose kid had been snatched, that's all." I was silent a

moment, and he kept looking at me as if he thought I'd practice levitation or something any minute now. "He drinks," I said.

"He sure does," Tomlinson agreed.

"Mrs. Jackridge is one of the old school. She said, 'they can't do that to me—!'" I stood up. "She put up the fifty grand, didn't she?"

He nodded.

"Why?"

He stood up, too.

"Because Jackridge was broke. In fact, he was worse than that. He owed a packet. The Jackridge & Sons Glass Co. Inc. was a hollow shell, brother, just a hollow shell. A business three generations old, and he ruined it. Speculation, over-expansion, and too much money spent to buy out his chief minority stock-holders, one of whom was his wife."

He put on his hat, and signalled to his extras.

"Let's go. Stay around, Krag. You'll be wanted."

"Nuts, and I was just getting ready to open up a branch in Calcutta," I said.

There it was, a case building up about which I could think a lot of thoughts. I was out of it, but I couldn't help thinking. Still, no one was paying me to do any thinking about it, so I did my best to forget it. Some day I was going to be called upon to give a few words of evidence on the subject, if the kidnappers were ever caught,

that is, and I didn't want my evidence to be colored by what I'd thought in the meantime.

I went down to the office afterwards, and found that Dave Ahrens, the lawyer, had been calling for hours, trying to get hold of me for a job. It was an insurance case, and he wanted me to prove that a certain witness had been bribed. I told him it would have to wait a few days, until I was sure the law didn't want me on tap any more. I messed around with a few other details, and went home. It looked as if that two hundred bucks would be spent long before I got a chance to earn any more. I wished I could do something about that. I wished the lads who had snatched Jackridges' kid had picked up a Bronx phone-book by mistake.

I went out to a movie that evening. When I found one I thought I might like, I called the night clerk of the apartment hotel where I lived, and told him where I'd be in case anyone wanted me. I saw a picture about the early settlers of the West. It seems they had it tough.

I returned to the apartment and breezed into the lobby. The night-clerk wasn't at his desk, so I couldn't ask him if there'd been any calls. I took the self-service elevator up to my floor, crossed the hall to my door, and got out my keys.

The door opened, and I was looking into a gun. It was held by a tall, weedy-looking individual

with a face like a guppy. It was just a narrow ridge on the front of his head, all bony nose, with a little, full-lipped mouth underneath. His eyes were like tiny vials of prune juice, and they seemed to be focused in two different directions, not on me. That wasn't anything to act on, though. He had a battered grey fedora on the back of his head, and about thirty dollars worth of pawn-shop special hanging on his skeleton. I could almost see through his ears.

"Step in, nosey," he said, "and drop the keys."

I stepped in.

"Walk over to the wall there," he said. "Don't do anything to make me nervous."

He looked as if his nerves were sticking through his suit already, so I walked carefully like a man measuring his rug. I saw the night clerk lying on the floor next to the sofa, his feet and hands bound and a gag cruelly distorting his mouth.

"Can I say something?" I asked, when I was facing him again.

He was leaning against the door. The gun was trembling.

"Sure, say a lot."

"You're off your nut, whatever your game is. I've been with the cops all day. They're due to call up any minute now. They'll want me to go down to Headquarters to look at some files sent up from Washington. Pictures and so forth. If they don't get an answer, they'll come looking for me."

"You're kidding." His black liquid eyes bored at me dully. "What made you think you'd get away with it?"

"With what? Who the-hell are you and what do you want?"

He walked slowly over to me, his long legs gawky, his gun still levelled at me.

"You louse," he said. He came up to within two feet of me, and cursed like a farmer who's been stepped on by a horse. I was calm enough now to think as well as talk, and that was what got home to me. He *did* talk like a farmer, or at least like someone from outside of New York City. His voice had a nasal twang to it, and he used curses that weren't common among city-bred people.

"I seem to have annoyed you," I purred, "but I haven't the dimmest notion why. What did I expect to get away with? What are you after anyway?"

"You switched the money," he said, and went off into the barnyard again. He was working himself up, his face twitching and hands shaking. "Damn you anyhow, you switched the dough! Didn't you know we had our eye on you? I'll scrag you for that!"

He swung with his left fist, awkwardly, holding the gun on me with his right. I had to take it. Pain exploded in my jaw, but it didn't rock me.

"Change hands," I grinned. "You're no lefty."

He smacked me again. The room see-sawed. At that, he was stronger than he looked. I staggered, and recovered.

"I wonder if you'd really shoot that thing," I said. "It would bring the whole building down on you."

"I'll shoot it all right," he snarled. "You got us in one hell of a mess, you have. Fifty Grand, and it ain't worth a damn nickel. You'll pay for that. With a bone broke for every grand you'll pay for it."

"I don't know what in hell you're talking about!" I roared.

He smacked me about the eyes, twice. Blood was trickling down my cheek, and my face felt like an overstuffed cushion. I didn't know whether I was more mad or scared. It was a close tie.

"Where'd you get it?" he rasped. "Where'd you get that dough?"

"What dough, you fish-faced abortion?" I yelled.

He hit again. The next time, I thought, I'll jump him. Either him or me. No more of this one-sided hitting.

"The ransom dough," he hissed. "They put the arm on Harry this afternoon for the Wyatt Falls bank job. The dough was marked, and it ain't been passed for half a year. Where'd you get it? We never been near Wyatt Falls in our lives!"

I relaxed. I knew now.

"I got it personally from the lily-white hands of Henry Jackridge," I said, and I was almost smiling. "That's all I know, and it's the

truth. If you think you can make anything out of scragging me, you're crazy. That's where I got the dough".

He stepped back a pace. He was frowning.

"It's impossible," he said. Before he could draw another breath I had his gun-wrist in my hand. I dug my thumb into his wrist making him squeak like a toy mouse. I pushed the gun out and down, stepped on his right toe, and then his left. He hopped and staggered like a drunken tap-dancer. I seized his wrist with both hands, ducked under his arm, and flung him over my shoulder. He landed across the room, but his gun lay on the floor. I picked it up and dropped it into my pocket. I went across the room slowly, allowing him time to arise and reassemble himself. I grinned.

"Pretty handy just now, weren't you? I didn't care for it," I said. "Believe it or not, it annoyed me."

I let him have it. A right and a left to the jaw, and a pounding in the ribs. He whimpered and went down. I gave him the leather. He crawled away. I looked around, my eye lighting on a statuette of a naked dame gazing up at the lighting-fixtute in an enraptured way. I used it for a book-end normally, but now I used it to put my tail-worn friend to sleep. I stripped off his belt and gagged him with it. I then untied the night-clerk and used the ropes to tie up the kangaroo.

"Stay here," I told the night-clerk. He looked as if he had just risen from the dead, but didn't believe it. "There's bourbon in that cabinet, there, imbibe."

When I saw that my chum was coming out of it quietly, I whipped off the gag. I squatted down next to him, and watched. He opened those wacky eyes, and looked at both my ears at once. I grinned.

"You scrounge," I said, "Let's talk."

He looked down at the floor.

I let him have it.

"C'mon lovable, talk!"

He talked.

I left instructions (ten dollars worth) with the night clerk to call Police Headquarters ten minutes after I'd left, and tell them exactly what had happened. Ten minutes was enough time for me to get my Ford out of the garage and head for the Washington Bridge. What I'd find when I got to Athens didn't matter, and I wasn't worried. They wouldn't soil my play, Tomilson and his crew; they wanted what only I could unearth. I held a damp rag to my face all the way to Athens.

It was almost four A.M. when I hit Athens, and twenty minutes later when I crawled at a thirty-degree angle up to the Jackridge mansion. I got out, chilled, and started up those steps. After a thousand years I was at the top. The wind bit at me, and the world looked as dead as Atlantis in the

mist and pre-dawn darkness. I knocked on the door. More time passed, then a light appeared in one of the windows downstairs. The door creaked open a crack.

"Who's there?"

It was only a whisper.

I shoved the door open, and walked in. I spun around, my hand on the gun in my pocket.

It was Mrs. Jackridge.

She was fully dressed, and as wide awake as a rube at a carnival. She held onto the door for a moment, then closed it.

"Good Morning, Mr. Krag," she said, in that low cultivated voice. "I'm afraid I didn't expect you."

"Quite all right, don't you know. Let's not be formal. Don't disturb the footmen and retainers. Have you got any coffee?"

She regarded me gravely. Poise. She had it.

"Of course. This way please. May I take your coat?"

"Sure. All except the gun." I shoved it into my pocket.

She raised her brows, but said nothing. I followed her into the cavernous parlor. There was a fire this time too, only bigger. She must have run across a bargain in logs.

I sat on the sofa, and stretched. After a while, she brought coffee on a tray. She sat opposite me, and we drank as if I were a visiting vicar. She was calm, cool, and watchful.

After I had had a few swallows of hot black coffee, and was sure I

was in the land of the living, I put down my cup and smiled.

"Would it be possible, Mrs. Jackridge, to speak to your husband?" She shook her head slowly.

"I'm afraid not," she answered. "You see, he isn't here."

"Indeed not? Where, may one ask, is he?"

She leaned back in her chair, and folded her hands. I could see she was as tired as a woman could be. There were shadows under her eyes that the dimness of the light couldn't shade away, and a drawn expression around the perfect mouth. But she was as calm and aloof as if we were discussing the program for a church social.

"I really don't know where he is," she said. "He's just gone."

"He's been kidnapped too?"

"I hardly think so, Mr. Krag. Nor do you."

I nodded.

"Truer words were never spoken," I said. "A few hours ago, I was out of this case entirely. The Feds and the New York cops had gone over me with a disc-harrow, and decided that I was no more than I seemed to be: a private detective of small means and limited brain-power who'd been picked arbitrarily by a gang of kidnapers to be their go-between. I went to a movie to take my mind off my troubles, and when I returned I found a hayseed with a gun who seemed to think I'd double-crossed him."

She nodded, to show that every immortal word was engraved in her mind.

"Why did he think I'd double-crossed him? Well, he and his pal, a certain Harry Dell, had kid-napped your son. Your husband had turned over to me fifty-thousand dollars to pay the ransom with. Two days later, Harry passed some of the money. He was arrested by nightfall."

"The police were very alert."

"You're not kidding. They were arrested for a bank robbery that had taken place in Wyatt Falls, New York, six months before."

She knit her brows. Puzzled, you know.

"Indeed?"

"In-deed. Now how do you think a thing like that could occur?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Is that a fact. Well, this bum was as mad as a Mexican at me. He thought I'd tampered with the ransom money in some way. I don't know why he thought I'd have money on me that was stolen from a bank in Wyatt Falls, but he thought it was me, all right. The numbers on the bills were registered, and broadcast. It was new money just brought in from the Federal Reserve."

"So?"

"So this. It wasn't *me* that paid them the ransom, it was your husband. If I'd substituted hot money for cold, I'd still have only fifty

grand. Why, then, was this cluck so suspicious of me? Why didn't he first bring all this up with your husband, who was the man who paid out the fifty grand?"

She sniffed.

"You're very clever, Mr. Krag. Why not, then?"

I leaned back, and grinned.

"Because, of course, your husband was above suspicion in that respect. He'd arranged with them to kidnap the kid, get you to pay the ransom, and then split it with him."

"Really?"

"You know it as well as I do, Mrs. Jackridge, that's why he's not here now. He's gone. There's nothing left for him here. He's lost you, he's ruined his business, he's found that his kid isn't worth as much to him as twenty-five grand and a chance to begin ruining his life somewhere else. The only thing, of course, is that when he starts passing that dough, he'll be caught just as Harry Dell was caught. The cops are probably trailing him now. He's crazy if he thinks a principal in a kidnapping case isn't watched day and night. They're watching you, they're watching me. They'll be here in no time asking me what I'm doing so far from home at this hour."

She nodded. A woman of few words.

"Before they do come, though," I said, "I'd like to tie it up in a neat package. If you tell me, maybe be-

tween the two of us, we can make it sound a little better for you. Where did you get that hot money that you gave your husband?"

"You mean the money for the ransom?"

"Yes. Without exaggerating, you can say that's what I mean."

She smiled. Just a little, grudging smile. "You think I held up the bank in—where was it?"

"Wyatt Falls. Look. You're beautiful, you're cultured, poised, cool, and a great lady of the old school. If I had a million and were better-looking, I'd ask you to be my wife. But the fact remains that you gave that money to your ex-husband to pay the kidnapppers with, and that very money was taken in a hold-up from the bank in Wyatt Falls six months ago. Now where did you get it?"

She stood up.

"From Joe d'Angelo. Now you'd better go. I've a hard day before me, you know. The FBI will probably be here, as well as the local police, and heaven knows what all. I really must sleep."

I rose too, a gentleman to the hat-brim.

"I quite understand, Mrs. Jackridge. Just repeat that name again?"

"D'Angelo. He's a coal and fuel dealer on Pensey Avenue. Do you intend to see him?"

"Why, I think he ought to be good for a few laughs."

"Probably not. Remember this,

though. When I traded fifty thousand good dollars for an equal amount of what you call 'hot ones', I didn't know that my husband was the real criminal himself. In my life I've taken hard knocks, you know. I've seen my husband ruin a business that two generations built up. He used my love for him to swindle me out of my share of it. He ruined our life together. He ruined himself. But I love my child, and I've always been determined that nothing shall hurt him—."

"I know. You said, 'they can't do this to me.'" That's what first started me thinking. So you made sure that they would be caught for something, even if it wasn't kidnapping. Very smart. Except of course, that once they were caught, it might come out that they *were* the kidnapppers, in which case the cops would want to know where you got the dough that was stolen from the bank. I know you're tired, but you'll have to do better than that."

She sighed.

"You're not a very nice person," she said. "It's true, though. I've known d'Angelo for some time. Everyone knows him. He's our local gangboss, I guess. He owns the Argosy Club, out on Route 17. They have gambling there. My husband and I often played. I think my husband owed him money. When I heard that my boy had been kidnapped, I went to him. I

thought, with his underworld connections, he could help. He promised to do all he could. He was quite kind. Then he suggested that I give him the money, and that the next day he would give me the bad money. I was afraid to do that, but he assured me it would be all right. If the police caught the men for kidnapping before they passed any of the money, he said he would take full responsibility. He said that he had enough protection to avoid being prosecuted by the state for possessing stolen money, and that the FBI would be grateful for his help in assuring the capture of the kidnapers for some offense, at least. So I acquiesced."

"Did you suspect your husband of complicity then?"

She nodded.

"I wasn't sure, but I suspected him. Believe me, it was the sort of thing he wouldn't mind doing. Besides, with so many wealthy people around, I thought it odd that the criminals should be so stupid or unfortunate as to pick as their victim the one man in town who was facing ruin."

"I see. Well, I'll see what I can do for you. A lot depends on Mr. d'Angelo. We'll see how kind he really is. Well, I'll see you later."

I left her standing there, weary to death and aloof and beyond fear, and went out. I went down those steps again, and got into my car. No one was in sight, but I wished I had a C-note for every

cop that had his eye on me. There was no particular reason why I was doing this, except that I was sure that this was a plot that couldn't be untangled by a cop. This d'Angelo would be a bird who'd know all about how to talk to cops. I wanted to get it straightened out. It wouldn't let me sleep if I didn't. And I felt I had to earn that two hundred bucks.

The coal and fuel business must have been prosperous, judging by the size of the three-story mansion on Pensey Avenue, and the Buick and two Cadillacs parked outside. A grey Cadillac, and a black one, to match his top-coats I guessed. I parked behind the grey one, and went up the steps (all the better-class homes in Athens had steps, it seems). It must have been hell on everyone over forty. I knocked on the door and rang the bell. After a few moments, in which the wind tried to raise me off the porch, the door opened a crack.

"Who's there?" a surly voice demanded.

"Engelbert Dollfuss," I replied. "Open up. I want to see Mr. d'Angelo."

"Who?" he squeaked. "Engel—?"

"Bert Dollfuss. C'mon, it makes to freeze out here."

"You a cop?"

"F B I."

The door opened. I was in a lofty hall done in heavy drapes and tapestries. A wide stairway

swooped up into the shadows. At the far end, light seeped from under the portieres. My host was a square article in a purple shirt and shoulder-holster. He was as bald as an egg.

"Show it," he said.

"Show what?"

"That you're from the FBI."

"Aw, I was only kidding. I'm really a plumbing inspector. Is Mr. d'Angelo here? I'd like to inspect his plumbing—."

He grabbed a handful of my coat, and shoved me toward the door.

"Out," he said. "Your act stinks."

A voice shouted behind the portieres.

"Luigi! Ch'e?"

My buddy rattled off some Italian, but I yelled over him, "Mr. d'Angelo! I've come from Mrs. Jackridge."

The curtains pulled apart, revealing a kitchen, brightly lit. My dancing-partner shoved me toward it. I walked in, and saw three men at a table. There was a jug of wine on the table, a bowl of nuts, and a deck of cards. Two of the men looked as if they'd cut their own throats just out of meanness, the other was a portly, balding, fat-faced lad of about fifty. He wore no tie on his custom-made silk shirt, but he had a fortune in jewelry on his pudgy, hairy fingers. He smiled, and nodded to the others. They rose, and left. My body-

guard frisked me, removed the difference, and evaporated too.

"Sit down," d'Angelo said, still smiling like a real-estate salesman. "What you say your name was?"

"Krag," I said.

"Have a glass of wine? Good. Imported."

"Thanks."

He poured me a glass. I drank. It was imported dago red.

"What can I do for you?"

I heaved a breath. It was about four-thirty in the morning, and I was beginning to feel the effects of a misspent life.

"I'm the private orb who was picked as go-between by the kidnapppers of Mrs. Jackridge's child. I'm sure you know what I'm talking about. All I want is the truth about this whole business, and to shield Mrs. Jackridge as much as possible."

"Why? She paying you?"

"No. Perhaps you wouldn't understand."

He shrugged and lit a cigar.

"Why not? Mrs. Jackridge is a fine woman. I got respect. A great lady. But why you have to find out anything. Who's paying you to?"

"No one. But the FBI, the New York police, the Athens police, and the State troopers will all be wanting to know where Mrs. Jackridge got the false shekels to pay Harry Dell. I'm not boring you?"

"Me? No."

"She says she got them from you."

"If she say so."

"So you admit it. What will we tell the law that won't make her look too bad?"

He thought a minute. You could see this was small onions to a big operator like him. He drank some more paint, and puffed at his cigar. The cigar smelled like it was imported from ancient Egypt.

He finally made up his mind.

"Come with me," he said.

I chuckled. Not loud, but with a bit of English onto it.

"Excuse me, Mr. d'Angelo, but I don't feel like going anywhere. I don't know about the coal and fuel business, but the detective business is kind of wearing. I'm tired. I'd a lot rather just sit and talk. What do I tell the cops? Or what do *we* tell the cops."

He settled back in his chair, his eyebrows raised. You could see he was a philosopher. It takes all kinds, he was thinking.

"I wanna show you something," he said.

"Let's talk first. Why did you give her that bashful money?"

He shrugged.

"Wots a matter? Why not? First place, she's a nice lady. Class, you get me? Second place, kidnap I don't like. It's bad."

"Hellish," I agreed.

"Is that a crack? Well, stealing kids is no good. I got a heart, you know? Besides, it ain't a racket. A racket, it's business. Good today, good tomorrow. Kidnap, you're

here today, gone tomorrow. Besides, how you think I feel? Somebody's pull a snatch in my territory without my permission. Makes cops, Feds, Newspapers, everyone, come in like a storm. You can't cover up a kidnap. Natural, I get mad. I figure I fix em."

"Of course, you put an ad in the papers, asking if anyone had any old marked money they couldn't dispose of—. Oh well, let it pass. I guess Wyatt Falls isn't in your territory."

"Never heard of the place," he said. He looked as if he really hadn't, too.

"Well," I said, "let's get back to business. How are we going to square this phoney money rap?"

He sighed. His fat face gleamed in the electric light like a greasy moon. It had no more expression than a planet too far from the earth to be interested.

"Listen," he said, blowing cigar smoke at me, "The cops got the kid back, right?"

"Yup."

"They got the Wyatt Falls bank money back, no?"

"Yup."

"What else do you think they want?"

I looked at him. He looked at me. I got another face full of ancient Egyptian cooked mummy-hair. I coughed.

"You tell me."

"They want Jackridge. Mrs. Jackridge give him fifty thousand

good fish. That's all she know. If Harry Dell wind up with bad money, that's Jackridge's fault. Let the coppers figure that one out. Me, I won't talk. You, you won't talk—."

"Her, she won't talk" I added.

"As long they got Jackridge, they'll be happy. They got a case. Dell's friend talk to you, you talk to the cops. They know Jackridge was broke. I got 5000 bucks worth of his I.O.U.'s myself. I'll show 'em to the law. They'll work him over so he'll talk."

"Sure," I agreed. "The only thing is, they haven't got him."

He rose to his feet, wheezing, using the table for support. When he was erect, and braced against the breeze, he sighed and said, "We're going to give him to them."

\* \* \*

On the way down to the Argosy Club, gliding through the darkness in the black Cadillac, little was said. Joe d'Angelo and I sat in the back, while one of his paisans drove. D'Angelo was lost in thought, and a cloud of smoke, while I was half-asleep. We got there after about a half an hour of gliding.

It was a quiet-looking place, with only a small neon sign in the shape of a sail-ship, and the air of a Tudor country-house. The bar was dimly-lit and cozy, the dance-floor sparsely populated. Beyond the dance-floor, down a narrow hall, was a large, luxuriant room. Great

mahogany tables, soft music over hidden loudspeakers, paintings on the wall, a goodly number of men and women dressed in evening-clothes. The tables were roulette, crap, and black-jack tables. A lovely set-up. D'Angelo nodded here and there, smiling like a host of the old school. He nudged me.

"That there is the Mayor."

"You mean it? He looks as honest as me."

He frowned. "Joke," he said.

He led me into a curtained alcove and unlocked a brass-studded door with a key on his key-ring. On the other side of the door was a brightly lit office that looked like the private den of a Mexican ranch owner. Soft chairs, white walls with pictures on them, dark beams across the ceiling, a cabinet or two, and broad desk in the corner. Lying on a leather-upholstered sofa under a reproduction of Bellini's Doge Loredano was Henry Jackridge. He was fast asleep, and looking a trifle the worse for wear.

D'Angelo waddled behind the desk, sat down, opened his coat, and heisted out a .44 Automatic. He checked the gat, took the safety off, and said, "Wake him up."

I shook Jackridge. He opened his eyes, and stared blankly at me for a few seconds. Suddenly the wheels started turning, and he shot up, gaping.

"You!" he whispered hoarsely. Then he swung around to feast his eyes on his host. "What is this?"

We'd sure made a hit. He didn't seem able to get his voice out of hock. He cleared his throat a few times, and clenched his fist. I got out of d'Angelo's line of fire, and tried to act as if I weren't too interested.

"Mr. Jackridge," d'Angelo said, "I think you better go now."

"Go? Where?"

"Anywhere. Take the breeze. It ain't healthy here."

Jackridge leaned back, and took a deep breath. He unclenched his fists, and his hands trembled. He was at the end of his rope. I could see that he knew it, too; that he didn't really believe there was any sense in talking. He just wouldn't admit it yet, that was all; Something had happened that he didn't know about, and he was in the soup. How did people ever manage to get themselves in such a mess?

Jackridge said, "What are you talking about, d'Angelo? You're not double-crossing me, are you? Why? What's this—" He waved toward me, and broke off.

d'Angelo sighed.

"Listen Jackridge," he said. "You crossed me. You gave those snatchers stolen money. They're caught already. Makes the case too hot. How I'm gonna get you away in such a short time? No. Deal's off. You get out, no open your mouth about me. I don't say nothing about you. Okay?"

Jackridge rose slowly to his feet.

"Stolen money? You're crazy! Where would I get stolen money?" d'Angelo shrugged.

"You don't believe me, read it in the papers tomorrow."

"It's true," I told Jackridge. "One of the thugs jumped me in my apartment last night and told me all about it. He thought I switched the dough."

"So," d'Angelo said, "You better go. Mr. Krag, here, will take you out the back way. He'll take you down the road a ways in my car, and let you loose. He'll be a witness, if necessary, that you were never here."

Jackridge glared at him, then me, his face pale.

d'Angelo rose, and took a gun out of his pocket. It was the one I'd taken from Fish-eyes back in my apartment.

"Here," he said. "Get rid of it after."

"Right."

I prodded Jackridge to the door. We slipped out. There was hardly anyone at the tables now, only a few loiterers, dead tired, trying to save their lunch money or break the house. The Mayor was gone. I guessed he'd be busy tomorrow.

We went out a side door, and into the parking lot. It was as cold as bitter death, and a pale, eerie dawn was seeping over the tree-tops. We went toward the Cadillac.

"There's nothing you would do to help me?" he said shakily. "Not for—no, I guess not."

"Nope. It's the end of the trail, Jackridge," I said.

He sighed.

I opened the door of the Cadillac, and shoved him in. I knew even before I climbed in that Tomlinson was behind the wheel, and two other men in the back, snapping cuffs on Jackridge.

"Well, well," Tomlinson said softly, "Good morning. I thought you'd never come out."

"I made it as quick as I could. I had to be polite, you know."

"Sure. But we've been shivering around this town all night without even a cup of coffee." He started her up, and we swung out onto the highway. "You sure did hop around. Of course, you'll tell us all about it."

"Sure."

"About Mr. d'Angelo, too, won't you?"

I sighed and lit a cigarette.

"There's some things I could tell you about Mr. d'Angelo that won't do you much good, I'm afraid."

"You mean about the Wyatt Falls money? The hell with that. I mean about being an accessory to a kidnapping. Under the law that's a serious crime, and your testimony would be valid. Why, if you didn't talk, I don't doubt we could send you away on the same charge."

There were more accessories in this case than you could shake a stick at. Now I was one myself.

"Look," I said, "if you are not prepared to prosecute d'Angelo as

a receiver of stolen money, you've got nothing on him. And you can't prosecute him. He could make up any story as to how he got that money, and you couldn't disprove it. And he'd get a lot of public sympathy for helping the lovely Mrs. Jackridge."

"So?"

"So we tell it this way. Jackridge arranged the kidnapping with Dell and his buddy. Where he met them, I didn't find out, but that's a detail. They were to split the money. To Jackridge, it seemed foolproof. His wife doted on the boy, and she had money. He never dreamed she'd go to d'Angelo for help, or that he would have some hot money on his hands that ordinarily he'd have to sell at a discount, but now could dispose of at a hundred per cent of value. You've got Jackridge, and the two actual kidnapers, all testifying against each other. You can hold the Wyatt Falls job over their heads to force a confession."

"But Mrs. Jackridge got the money. Jackridge will insist on that. No, we've got no alternative. Bank robbery's a Federal crime. We'll have to find out where d'Angelo got that money."

"Do you? He'll love me for that."

"As we all do," Tomlinson said wearily, "as we all do."

Jackridge and his pals were put away. Mrs. Jackridge won the sympathy of one and all at the trial,

and subsequently received three proposals of marriage, not from me. d'Angelo was grilled about the Wyatt Falls money, gave away nothing, and was sent up for five-to-ten as an accessory on that job. As he was led out of the court room, he paused by me, and said, Take care, amico. You made me trouble."

What could I say? Since then, I've received two threatening phone-calls. I've been trailed all over town by some hard-looking characters of the Latin persuasion. I'm waiting for a shot, or a bomb wired to the ignition of my car. The cops are bored by the whole thing. I sometimes think I'll sell the good-will and fixtures, and open a laundromat. Or move to Athens, Greece, and blend in with the

ruins. What the hell, I'm one myself, in a way.

I called Mrs. Jackridge once, after the trial, just for old times sake. She was cordial, without gushing, grateful in a cool sort of way. I asked her if she was taking any action to get her fifty thousand back from d'Angelo.

"No," she said. "I'd rather forget the whole thing. I'm sick of court-rooms. And, after all, that man did help me."

"At a tidy profit to himself," I said. "Well, I see your point. Be happy."

"I'll try to. And thanks again. If you're ever up this way, drop in and see me, won't you?"

"Sure."

But I never got up that way again.



# The payment is death.

BY  
JOHN E. CAMERON

*I told Latic he'd get Sam's gold cigar  
box as a bonus when the job was done.*

**J**ACK COLMAR." Solly's plaintive bleat came out of the night, from somewhere behind me.

I froze. When Solly called your name on a rainswept waterfront, you had ten seconds left to live. His contracts always specified death.

As I tensed for the tearing impact of the bullet, I heard a faint scuffle, followed by a gurgling moan.

Slowly I heeled 'round. The script had been rewritten and I wanted to meet the writer.

They were barely visible in the wet gloom. Solly, his bulk unmis-

takable, in the twitches of death; and a thin, weedy character busy recovering a knife from Solly's back. Not until Solly had been consigned to the East River, did the weedy one speak.

"Ned wants to talk to you, Colmar." The voice was surprisingly gruff, and decidedly hostile.

I fired a smoke and took a long, deep drag. Maybe I'd be better off dead.

Ned Latic had six good reasons to talk to me. I had blown all six to hell with one bomb. Thoughts

of escape chased each other through my brain like wet pupies. Weedy's knife pricking my hide turned that idea sour, as sour as my bright idea to return to Chicago.

That I was expected at Lattic's Bar and Grill was obvious. Torpedoes who would have blasted my guts on sight, acted like head waiters.

Lattic was needling someone on the phone when we entered the plush office. The bar and grill were legit, but Lattic's real business and legitimacy were antonyms. He peddled everything from dames to death.

A shade under six feet, his lean, hard body, greying hair and imported clothes gave the impression of a respectable citizen. The face spoiled it. It was the kind of face that should be kept in a bag. His features had been scrambled in a dozen fights. Only the cold, grey eyes and thin, cruel lips were unchanged.

They were the real Lattic. An underworld Prince who wanted to be King.

He hung up and thumbed me into a chair.

"Any trouble?" he asked weedy.

"Solly almost had him."

"Just as well for you he didn't."

Lattic's voice was like breaking glass.

His grey eyes washed over me. "You work for me now," he stated flatly.

"Suppose I refuse?"

"Martin kills you." He indicated weedy. "He would like that. You killed his buddies."

It was a silly question. I waited.

"The 'vine has it you took Sam Effron for ten grand," said Lattic.

I grinned inwardly. Before taking French leave, I had goosed Sam, my ex-boss and underworld King of the mid-West, for twice that, plus his pet babe. I had a feeling that it was the latter theft that had needled Sam into letting out the contract on me. Like all Kings, he hated to lose his Queen.

Lattic lit a four-bit cigar. "Why'd you come back, Colmar?"

"Forgot my toothbrush." I crushed my smoke in an ashtray and watched closely for the reaction to my crack. If he needed me real bad he would let it ride.

Lattic's eyes bored holes in my shirt front. "Try again," he invited coldly. "How come you and Sam split?"

"Damsel in distress," I answered levelly. "Sam was no hell as a lover." I omitted to mention that Sam had wised up to the fact I'd been robbing him blind.

Lattic nodded. "Your first job is to kill Sam," he said.

I jerked erect. "Hold it, Lattic," I yelled. "That guy is better protected than Fort Knox."

"So what?" he snapped. "You're the best bomber in the business. 'Sides, you know more 'bout Effron and his habits than anyone else."

"What's my end?"

"Your life. Either Sam or I'll take you if you blow it." He leaned back, blew a smoke ring and watched it float up to the ornate ceiling.

"After this job you're on regular payroll. The slate's clean."

"Thanks," I said sourly. "When do you want him taken?"

"By the end of the month. Martin's goin' to see to it you stay healthy," he added by way of dismissal.

As Martin and I left I wondered if I should have let my money rot. The way it stacked now, I was going to be the richest guy in the graveyard, or river.

I had twelve days. Latic's glib promise of life cut no ice. As Sam Effron's liquidator-in-chief I had hurt Latic bad. Apart from six of his boys, I'd blasted two warehouses and sundry other joints.

Latic never forgave anyone.

I spent the first two days at the window of the apartment Latic had fixed up. It was directly across from Effron's office building. Sam's fronts covered everything from insurance to imports. His headquarters were the executive suite on the fifteenth floor. From there, he ruled his empire with brutal ruthlessness bordering on sadism. I wasn't kidding when I made the crack about Fort Knox. Even the blonde secretary outside his door packed a rod, and would burn you without batting her store-bought eyelashes.

On the third morning, Sam ar-

rived, as usual, in a three car convoy. The first car disgorged its load of bodyguards. Two positioned themselves at the marble portals. Two more went inside to check the entrance lobby and private elevator. Sam's Caddy came next, followed by the rearguard.

Sam emerged, closely heeled by Nick Renner, who had taken my job.

Sam was around five-five, plump, impeccably dressed and as mean as a starving alley-cat. I put the glasses on him when he looked back. His round, puffy face was whiter than usual. The beady black eyes looked like currants set in unbaked dough. He was drooling. The King was frightened.

I did not have to see through walls to know what happened next. Sam would head straight for the private elevator, his short legs pumping like pistons.

At the fifteenth floor, he would strut and preen for blondie's benefit. Next, he would go to his private washroom. Ten minutes later, ensconced behind the huge desk, he would light up a two-dollar cigar and buzz for the first caller.

I was about to turn from the window when I saw the sleeper play. A vintage Buick cruised slowly past the door from the opposite direction. I recognized it. Hit the gas and you no longer drove that bus, you flew it. Inside were three of the best triggermen money could buy. I felt a trickle of sweat course

down my neck. "Time for a drink," I thought.

Two stiff shots later I feel better. Maybe a little relaxation would help me to think.

"Susan." The thought of Sam's ex-Queen made me drool. My eager fingers were two inches from the phone when a knife sprouted from the desk.

"No calls." Martin was leaning against the bedroom door. Dried beer foam had left a tide mark on his upper lip.

Five-three, sunken cheeked and disreputable, he was an easy guy to hate. His hazel eyes looked like badly made imitations. Wearing the crumpled suit he had slept in, he was massaging an unshaven cheek with the handle of a wicked looking knife.

"Who were you thinking of calling, Colmar?"

"None of your damn business," I rasped. During the last two days he had been morose and taciturn.

He vanished into the bedroom and brought out a newspaper. "Page two," he crowed as he threw it at me.

My stomach crawled. Susan had been found in the gutter beneath the 'El'. Every bone in her body broken and the body openings stuffed with 'C' notes.

"Throwback to the Capone era," the news-hounds called it.

Martin gave a hollow laugh. "Your ex-boss is nice people," he sneered.

I thought of all the promise that had been fulfilled by that sleek, seductive white body. Our six weeks of sheer heaven together. I blundered past Martin and was violently sick into the toilet.

In the few seconds of red haze that follows sickness, I saw how I was going to kill Effron. No. Not kill—destroy. You only kill people.

For kicks I belted Martin across the mouth, hard, then sat down to think. A bottle of Rye later I perfected my plan. As a bonus I added an extra twist. My sleeper play.

"Call Lattic," I ordered Martin. "Tell him it's set for two days from now. You can also tell him he gets Sam's cigar box as a present."

As I dropped off to sleep, I thought the cigar box was a nice touch. Made of solid gold, it was Sams' proudest possession and served as a symbol of his standing.

Martin prodded me awake. A plate of greasy hash sogged on the table. After a couple of mouthfuls I pushed it away and fired a smoke.

"As a cook you'd make a good dog-poisoner," I remarked in disgust.

"Thanks for the idea," he intoned. "You can be my first customer. He had shaved. A red weal showed where I had hit him. It would fade, but the scar on his mind wouldn't.

"Got a car?" I asked.

"What for?"

"To go horseback riding," I snapped sarcastically.

"Funny man." His eyes glittered with hate.

I decided not to crowd him too hard—yet.

"My workshop's on the Southside," I explained. "I need some stuff for the job."

"Such as?"

"Explosives."

"Don't blow yourself to hell," he grunted hopefully. "O.K." he continued, "We go when it's dark."

In the car I realized he was one sweet wheeler. He knew every street and alley and drove as though he had been born behind the wheel. One of Sam's boys spotted us and gave chase. Martin lost him, fast. The incident made me revise a plan I had for disposing of Martin. He could live a little longer.

My workshop was in the basement of a rat-infested tenement. I flipped the light and aimed Martin at the beer. It would keep him out of my hair. A small shot of Scotch, well thinned with water, did me. The job on hand needed a sure hand and clear head. During the war I had seen the result of mixing booze and bombs.

Before starting I rigged a curtain around my bench. If Martin could see, he might get ideas.

Dawn, and Martins' eyes, were both showing red by the time I had the mechanical end of the job working just right. I hustled a cold breakfast out of cans and relaxed. The tricky bit was yet to come. Loading and fusing my babies.

The explosives were in a steel-lined, concrete vault under the floor. Martin's chair had been on top of it all night. He turned pale green when I opened it up.

I looked him straight in the eye. "For rats," I taunted.

He drew a knife and took a step towards me. I held a bottle of clear liquid between two fingers.

"Stalemate," I barked. He backed down, his pinched face twisted with hate.

When I finished I put everything in a case and locked it in the vault, then sat down to wait for darkness. Sleep was impossible. Martin's hate had grown so big it might erupt if I so much as blinked.

My only hope lay in his fear of Latic.

It was a night for ducks. Water ran down the back of my neck as we watched lights blink on and off in the building. The night watchman was on his rounds. Martin was for killing him until I pointed out that unless the check-clocks were punched within five minutes of the pre-set times, an alarm would sound.

The last of the cleaning staff left at two. When my watch showed two-thirty I picked up my case.

"O.K." I whispered. "Let's try our luck at the back door." I was praying that Sam had not changed every lock in the building. He hadn't.

The greatest risk lay in making the dash from the service stairs to

the private elevator. As Martin reached for the button I grabbed his wrist.

"Push that," I hissed, "and a buzzer sounds on the fifteenth floor. Boost me," I ordered.

The emergency hatch in the roof of the car opened easily. Climbing up on the roof, I grabbed my case.

Once the special shoulder harness was secure I hauled Martin up and closed the hatch. My flash flared briefly to show a narrow ladder bolted to the wall and stretching up into the darkness.

"Hope you're in good shape," I whispered.

"Better than you'll ever be. Get going."

Climbing fifteen floors up a vertical ladder with a box of sudden death on your back is gut-busting work. When we finally made it I was hot and panting.

My hands and legs were on fire. Getting the door open nearly caused me to take a death dive down the shaft. Time was running out. My watch told me the watchman was doing his rounds again. A frantic scramble saw us safe in a small store room.

It was close. A steel door clanged at the fourteenth floor. After what seemed an age I heard the muted thump of the check-clock at the elevator.

I gave it five minutes.

"Why didn't we use the back stairs?" Martin demanded angrily.

"You need a special key to unlock

the alarm," I pointed out as I led the way to my old office.

I found the switch that controlled the electric eye and killed it. The executive suite was all ours.

I positioned Martin in my old office. "Stay here," I ordered. "If anyone comes, take him."

Sam's office was unchanged. The gold and cream decor, intended to be regal was garish. The solid gold cigar box sat in the center of the desk. I hesitated, then decided to get on with the main job.

The washroom was as garish as the office, and strictly private. Once, Sam had heard about picking up disease from toilet seats. The idea had taken hold and no amount of logic would shift it. I closed the door and switched on the light. Unstrapping the case, I got down to work.

My device was simple. A two by nine cylinder contained the charge and a spring loaded detonator.

The cylinder was clamped to the overflow pipe inside the tank and a wire led from the safety pin to the flushing arm. You only had to flush the toilet to explode the bomb.

The whole thing was wrapped in a waterproof cover.

To ensure that I didn't get blown up installing it, I had added a secondary safety which could be withdrawn without disturbing the cover. I was sure of this baby.

I had used it many times when on sabotage missions during the war.

The flushing arm gave me a bad time. It was shorter than I had figured on. Salty sweat stung my eyes and trickled into my mouth as I fought to set the trigger without flushing the toilet. A flushed toilet in an empty building is sure-fire alarm signal. Finally I made it and paused to do deep breathing exercises. Once I stopped shaking I removed the secondary safety.

I had taken twenty-one minutes. Just enough time left for the cigar box.

Two years earlier I had had the idea of making a brass one and pulling a switch. The duplicate was a frost so I shelved the idea, but kept the box. Now I pulled it out of the case. It wouldn't pass more than a casual scrutiny, but it would serve its purpose.

Switching cigars, I reloaded the gold box with a crude bomb. The bomb was on the grenade principal, the only difference being, you raised the lid instead of pulling a pin. It was like instant coffee—no waiting. I felt bad parting with so valuable an object, but when your life is up for grabs it sometimes makes sense to buy it back with gold.

"Payment in gold," I thought as I wrapped it. "I am paying Lattic's bus fare to hell with gold."

We made it back to the store room with three minutes to spare.

The rain was coming down in torrents when we made the dash for the car. Maybe it was that, plus

lack of sleep that made Martin careless. I did not stop to ask. A swift judo chop, delivered very inexpertly, was enough to put him to sleep and let me snatch his knives. He packed four of them. I wanted to park all four in his unwashed hide, but he was still useful to me.

He woke up half an hour later and reached for his gut-rippers.

"Guess you mislaid them," I mocked.

For five minutes he cursed without repeating himself. It was a fascinating recital of things my Mother never told me. I turned it off with a backhand to the belly, and drove to within a block of Lattic's house.

"Get out, weed," I ordered, "and take this box to Lattic. He's expecting it, so don't get sticky fingered," I warned.

"Bastard," he hissed. "I'll be seeing you again."

"Do that," I invited. "Just as soon as you tire of living."

I felt like a million dollars as I ditched the car and flagged a cab. I gave Lorrie's address.

Lorrie, a petit brunette, had a mind as broad as her waist was narrow. And a lot more besides.

As she cooked up a mixed grill I took a long drag at a smoke and downed my third straight Scotch.

"After breakfast?" The question was loaded. Lorrie never spoke, she put words to music in a way that raised goose bumps.

"Sleep," I said positively. "It's been a busy night."

"I hope she didn't wear you out," Lorrie pouted.

"You're the only girl in my life, baby," I protested as she responded to my pressure on her waist.

Sometime during that long, deep kiss, I fell asleep.

When I wakened she was looking at me speculatively. "You weren't kidding when you said you had a busy night," she said. "It made page one."

I grabbed the paper. They had given it banner treatment.

Sam Effron had been blasted into a million pieces, with lesser, but still fatal damage to Renner and blondie. The bomb was more powerful than I had intended. "Must be getting old," I thought.

Ned Lattic died a golden death,

along with Martin. I had banked on Lattic's greed making my sleeper play pay off. He couldn't wait to open the box.

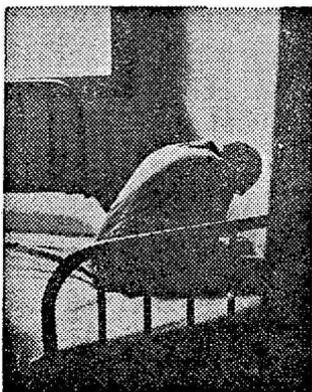
The cops had the angles figured—wrong. They spread the good news that a rival boss from the East had moved in and was disposing of local talent.

I reached for a smoke. There were two vacancies at the top. A crown just waiting for a man big enough to wear it. My brain started to whirl.

It settled down when Lorrie removed the cigarette from my lips and replaced it with a hot, demanding mouth.

I decided the empire could wait for its new King. Right now it was a case of first things first.





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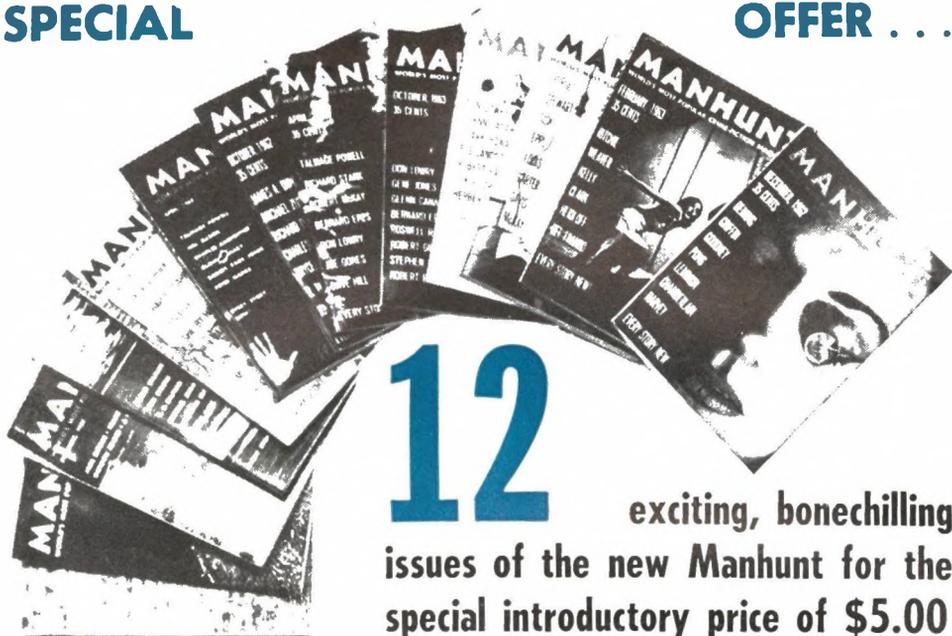
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