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a SHELL SCOTT story by
Richard S. Prather

SQUADROOM

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ROSS MACDONALD *(Midnight Blue)*, another Californian, has written an even dozen novels about Lew Archer. His latest novel is *The Ferguson Affair*. Often compared to the late, great Raymond Chandler, Macdonald owes his enormous popularity to the depth, compassion, and insight of his writing. Macdonald's profession is very much a family affair: his wife is the mystery novelist Margaret Millar.

ANTHONY BOUCHER'S appraisal of fictional crime, as mystery editor of *The New York Times*, has made him the reigning expert in the genre. His clear and incisive treatment extends to the factual world of crime, too, as in this issue's in-depth study of the Sangret murder case, *On a Day Unknown*.

HELEN NIELSEN *(Confession)* is one of the very few feminine authors capable of turning out lean, unsentimental crime fiction in the realistic tradition. Her appearance on the mystery scene was greeted with cheers, one critic calling her "the first major addition to the mystery field in the past decade." Miss Nielsen has since enhanced that reputation with a long list of fine books like her latest, *Sing Me a Murder*. The critic whose accolade launched Miss Nielsen's career, incidentally, was Anthony Boucher.

Hard Sell is one of the last John J. Malone stories by the late **CRAIG RICE**. Miss Rice was the author of such classic mystery novels as *Trial by Fury* and *Home Sweet Homicide*. **FLETCHER FLORA** *(Assassin)* is the winner of the 1960 Macmillan Award for his new mystery novel, *Killing Cousins*. **RICHARD MATHESON** *(The Faces)*, foremost exponent of the modern tale of terror, leads off the *Graveyard Shift* department. **REX LARDNER** *(Reasonable Facsimile)*, a long-time *New Yorker* magazine staffer, is noted for his probing studies in print. This time, he contributes a detailed and fascinating *Special Report* on counterfeiting.

ED McBAIN'S mystery book • no. 1

editor
Ed McBain

managing editor
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associate editor
Demi Marciano

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designer
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Maxwell Marxe

cover
Harry Bennett

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A LEW ARCHER NOVELETTE

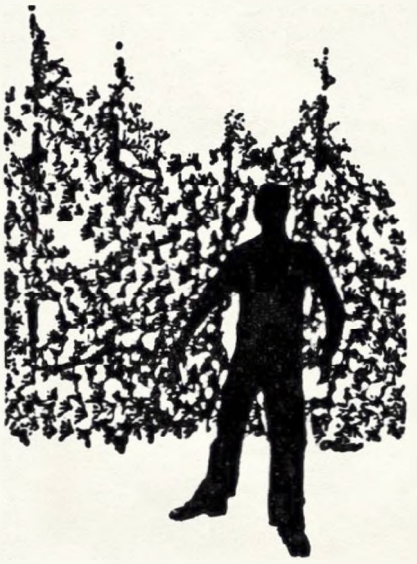
BY ROSS MACDONALD

MIDNIGHT BLUE

The old man told Archer to stay off his place, but Archer couldn't see why. Then he found the dead girl.

IT HAD RAINED IN THE CANYON during the night. The world had the colored freshness of a butterfly just emerged from the chrysalis stage and trembling in the sun. Actual butterflies danced in flight across free spaces of air or played a game of tag without any rules among the tree branches. At this height there were giant pines among the eucalyptus trees.

I parked my car where I usually parked it, in the shadow of the stone building just inside the gates of the old estate. Just inside the posts, that is—the gates had long since fallen from their rusted hinges. The owner of the country house had died in Europe, and the place had stood empty since the war. It was one reason I came here on the occasional Sunday when I wanted to get away from the Hollywood rat race. Nobody lived within two miles.



Until now, anyway. The window of the gatehouse overlooking the drive had been broken the last time that I'd noticed it. Now it was patched up with a piece of cardboard. Through a hole punched in the middle of the cardboard, bright emptiness watched me—human eye's bright emptiness.

"Hello," I said.

A grudging voice answered: "Hello."

The gatehouse door creaked open, and a white-haired man came out. A smile sat strangely on his ravaged face. He walked mechanically, shuffling in the leaves, as if his body was not at home in the world. He wore faded denims through which his clumsy muscles bulged like animals in a sack. His feet were bare.

I saw when he came up to me that he was a huge old man, a head taller than I was and a foot wider. His smile was not a greeting or any kind of a smile that I could respond to. It was the stretched, blind grimace of a man who lived in a world of his own, a world that didn't include me.

"Get out of here. I don't want trouble. I don't want nobody messing around."

"No trouble," I said. "I came up

to do a little target shooting. I probably have as much right here as you have."

His eyes widened. They were as blue and empty as holes in his head through which I could see the sky.

"Nobody has the rights here that I have. I lifted up mine eyes unto the hills and the voice spoke and I found sanctuary. Nobody's going to force me out of my sanctuary."

I could feel the short hairs bristling on the back of my neck. Though my instincts didn't say so, he was probably a harmless nut. I tried to keep my instincts out of my voice.

"I won't bother you. You don't bother me. That should be fair enough."

"You bother me just *being* here. I can't stand people. I can't stand cars. And this is twice in two days you come up harrying me and harassing me."

"I haven't been here for a month."

"You're an Ananias liar." His voice whined like a rising wind. He clenched his knobbed fists and shuddered on the verge of violence.

"Calm down, old man," I said. "There's room in the world for both of us."

He looked around at the high green world as if my words had snapped him out of a dream.

"You're right," he said in a different voice. "I have been blessed, and I must remember to be joyful. Joyful. Creation belongs to all of us poor creatures." His smiling teeth were as long and yellow as an old horse's. His roving glance fell on my car. "And it wasn't you who come up here last night. It was a different automobile. I remember."

He turned away, muttering something about washing his socks, and dragged his horny feet back into the gatehouse. I got my targets, pistol, and ammunition out of the trunk, and locked the car up tight. The old man watched me through his peephole, but he didn't come out again.

Below the road, in the wild canyon, there was an open meadow backed by a sheer bank which was topped by the crumbling wall of the estate. It was my shooting gallery. I slid down the wet grass of the bank and tacked a target to an oak tree, using the butt of my heavy-framed twenty-two as a hammer.

While I was loading it, something caught my eye—something that glinted red, like a ruby among the leaves. I stooped to pick it up and found that it was attached. It was a red-enameled fingernail at the tip of a white hand. The hand was cold and stiff.

I let out a sound that must have been loud in the stillness. A jay bird erupted from a manzanita, sailed up to a high limb of the oak, and yelled down curses at me. A dozen chickadees flew out of the oak and settled in another at the far end of the meadow.

Panting like a dog, I scraped away the dirt and wet leaves that had been loosely piled over the body. It was the body of a girl wearing a midnight-blue sweater and skirt. She was a blonde, about seventeen. The blood

that congested her face made her look old and dark. The white rope with which she had been garrotted was sunk almost out of sight in the flesh of her neck. The rope was tied at the nape in what is called a granny's knot, the kind of knot that any child can tie.

I left her where she lay and climbed back up to the road on trembling knees. The grass showed traces of the track her body had made where someone had dragged it down the bank. I looked for tire marks on the shoulder and in the rutted, impacted gravel of the road. If there had been any, the rain had washed them out.

I trudged up the road to the gatehouse and knocked on the door. It creaked inward under my hand. Inside there was nothing alive but the spiders that had webbed the low black beams. A dustless rectangle in front of the stone fireplace showed where a bedroll had lain. Several blackened tin cans had evidently been used as cooking utensils. Gray embers lay on the cavernous hearth. Suspended above it from a spike in the mantel was a pair of white-cotton work socks. The socks were wet. Their owner had left in a hurry.

It wasn't my job to hunt him. I drove down the canyon to the highway and along it for a few miles to the outskirts of the nearest town. There a drab green box of a building with a flag in front of it housed the Highway Patrol. Across the highway was a lumberyard, deserted on Sunday.

2.

"Too bad about Ginnie," the dispatcher said when she had radioed the local sheriff. She was a thirtyish brunette with fine black eyes and dirty fingernails. She had on a plain white blouse, which was full of her.

"Do you know Ginnie?"

"My young sister knows her. They go—they went to high school together. It's an awful thing when it happens to a young person like that. I knew she was missing—I got the report when I came on at eight—but I kept hoping that she was just off on a lost weekend, like. Now there's nothing to hope for, is there?" Her eyes were liquid with feeling. "Poor Ginnie. And poor Mr. Green."

"Her father?"

"That's right. He was in here with her high-school counselor not more than an hour ago. I hope he doesn't come back right away. I don't want to be the one that has to tell him."

"How long has the girl been missing?"

"Just since last night. We got the report here about 3 A.M., I think. Apparently she wandered away from a party at Cavern Beach. Down the pike a ways." She pointed south toward the mouth of the canyon.

"What kind of party was it?"

"Some of the kids from the Union High School—they took some wienies down and had a fire. The party was part of graduation week. I happen to know about it because my young sister Alice went. I didn't want

her to go, even if it was supervised. That can be a dangerous beach at night. All sorts of bums and scroungers hang out in the caves. Why, one night when I was a kid I saw a naked man down there in the moonlight. He didn't have a woman with him, either."

She caught the drift of her words, did a slow blush, and checked her loquacity. I leaned on the plywood counter between us.

"What sort of girl was Ginnie Green?"

"I wouldn't know. I never really knew her."

"Your sister does."

"I don't let my sister run around with girls like Ginnie Green. Does that answer your question?"

"Not in any detail."

"It seems to me you ask a lot of questions."

"I'm naturally interested, since I found her. Also, I happen to be a private detective."

"Looking for a job?"

"I can always use a job."

"So can I, and I've got one and I don't intend to lose it." She softened the words with a smile. "Excuse me; I have work to do."

She turned to her short-wave and sent out a message to the patrol cars that Virginia Green had been found. Virginia Green's father heard it as he came in the door. He was a puffy gray-faced man with red-rimmed eyes. Striped pajama bottoms showed below the cuffs of his trousers. His shoes were muddy, and he walked as if he had been walking all night.

He supported himself on the edge of the counter, opening and shutting his mouth like a beached fish. Words came out, half strangled by shock.

"I heard you say she was dead, Anita."

The woman raised her eyes to his. "Yes. I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Green."

He put his face down on the counter and stayed there like a penitent, perfectly still. I could hear a clock somewhere, snipping off seconds, and in the back of the room the L.A. police signals like muttering voices coming in from another planet. Another planet very much like this one, where violence measured out the hours.

"It's my fault," Green said to the bare wood under his face. "I didn't bring her up properly. I haven't been a good father."

The woman watched him with dark and glistening eyes ready to spill. She stretched out an unconscious hand to touch him, pulled her hand back in embarrassment when a second man came into the station. He was a young man with crew-cut brown hair, tanned and fit looking in a Hawaiian shirt. Fit looking except for the glare of sleeplessness in his eyes and the anxious lines around them.

"What is it, Miss Brocco? What's the word?"

"The word is bad." She sounded angry. "Somebody murdered Ginnie Green. This man here is a detective and he just found her body up in Trumbull Canyon."

The young man ran his fingers through his short hair and failed to get a grip on it, or on himself. "My God! That's terrible!"

"Yes," the woman said. "You were supposed to be looking after her, weren't you?"

They glared at each other across the counter. The tips of her breasts pointed at him through her blouse like accusing fingers. The young man lost the glaring match. He turned to me with a wilted look.

"My name is Connor, Franklin Connor, and I'm afraid I'm very much to blame in this. I'm a counselor at the high school, and I was supposed to be looking after the party, as Miss Brocco said."

"Why didn't you?"

"I didn't realize. I mean, I thought they were all perfectly happy and safe. The boys and girls had pretty well paired off around the fire. Frankly, I felt rather out of place. They aren't children, you know. They were all seniors, they had cars. So I said good night and walked home along the beach. As a matter of fact, I was hoping for a phone call from my wife."

"What time did you leave the party?"

"It must have been nearly eleven. The ones who hadn't paired off had already gone home."

"Who did Ginnie pair off with?"

"I don't know. I'm afraid I wasn't paying too much attention to the kids. It's graduation week, and I've had a lot of problems—"

The father, Green, had been listening with a changing face. In a sudden yammering rage his implosive grief and guilt exploded outward.

"It's your business to know! By God, I'll have your job for this. I'll make it *my* business to run you out of town."

Connor hung his head and looked at the stained tile floor. There was a thin spot in his short brown hair, and his scalp gleamed through it like bare white bone. It was turning into a bad day for everybody, and I felt the dull old nagging pull of other people's trouble, like a toothache you can't leave alone.

3.

The sheriff arrived. flanked by several deputies and an HP sergeant. He wore a western hat and a rawhide tie and a blue gabardine business suit which together produced a kind of gun-smog effect. His name was Pearsall.

I rode back up the canyon in the right front seat of Pearsall's black Buick, filling him in on the way. The deputies' Ford and an HP car followed us, and Green's new Oldsmobile convertible brought up the rear.

The sheriff said: "The old guy sounds like a looney to me."

"He's a loner, anyway."

"You never can tell about them hoboes. That's why I give my boys instructions to roust 'em. Well, it looks like an open-and-shut case."

"Maybe. Let's keep our minds open anyway, Sheriff."

"Sure. Sure. But the old guy went on the run. That shows consciousness of guilt. Don't worry, we'll hunt him down. I got men that know these hills like you know your wife's geography."

"I'm not married."

"Your girl friend, then." He gave me a sideways leer that was no gift. "And if we can't find him on foot, we'll use the air squadron."

"You have an air squadron?"

"Volunteer, mostly local ranchers. We'll get him." His tires squealed on a curve. "Was the girl raped?"

"I didn't try to find out. I'm not a doctor. I left her as she was."

The sheriff grunted. "You did the right thing at that."

Nothing had changed in the high meadow. The girl lay waiting to have her picture taken. It was taken many times, from several angles. All the birds flew away. Her father leaned on a tree and watched them go. Later he was sitting on the ground.

I volunteered to drive him home. It wasn't pure altruism. I'm incapable of it. I said when I had turned his Oldsmobile:

"Why did you say it was your fault, Mr. Green?"

He wasn't listening. Below the road four uniformed men were wrestling a heavy covered aluminum stretcher up the steep bank. Green watched them as he had watched the departing birds, until they were out of sight around a curve.

"She was so young," he said to the back seat.

I waited, and tried again. "Why did you blame yourself for her death?"

He roused himself from his daze. "Did I say that?"

"In the Highway Patrol office you said something of the sort."

He touched my arm. "I didn't mean I killed her."

"I didn't think you meant that. I'm interested in finding out who did."

"Are you a cop—a policeman?"

"I have been."

"You're not with the locals."

"No. I happen to be a private detective from Los Angeles. The name is Archer."

He sat and pondered this information. Below and ahead the summer sea brimmed up in the mouth of the canyon.

"You don't think the old tramp did her in?" Green said.

"It's hard to figure out how he could have. He's a strong-looking old buzzard, but he couldn't have carried her all the way up from the beach. And she wouldn't have come along with him of her own accord."

It was a question, in a way.

"I don't know," her father said. "Ginnie was a little wild. She'd do a thing *because* it was wrong, *because* it was dangerous. She hated to turn down a dare, especially from a man."

"There were men in her life?"

"She was attractive to men. You saw her, even as she is." He gulped. "Don't get me wrong. Ginnie was never a *bad* girl. She was a little headstrong, and I made mistakes. That's why I blame myself."

"What sort of mistakes, Mr. Green?"

"All the usual ones, and some I made up on my own." His voice was bitter. "Ginnie didn't have a mother, you see. Her mother left me years ago, and it was as much my fault as hers. I tried to bring her up myself. I didn't give her proper supervision. I run a restaurant in town, and I don't get home nights till after midnight. Ginnie was pretty much on her own since she was in grade school. We got along fine when I was there, but I usually wasn't there.

"The worst mistake I made was letting her work in the restaurant over the weekends. That started about a year ago. She wanted the money for clothes, and I thought the discipline would be good for her. I thought I could keep an eye on her, you know. But it didn't work out. She grew up too fast, and the night work played hell with her studies. I finally got the word from the school authorities. I fired her a couple of months ago, but I guess it was too late. We haven't been getting along too well since then. Mr. Connor said she resented my indecision, that I gave her too much responsibility and then took it away again."

"You've talked her over with Connor?"

"More than once, including last night. He was her academic counselor, and he was concerned about her grades. We both were. Ginnie finally pulled through, after all, thanks to him. She was going to graduate. Not that it matters now, of course."

Green was silent for a time. The sea expanded below us like a second blue dawn. I could hear the roar of the highway. Green touched my elbow again, as if he needed human contact.

"I oughtn't to've blown my top at Connor. He's a decent boy, he means well. He gave my daughter hours of free tuition this last month. And he's got troubles of his own, like he said."

"What troubles?"

"I happen to know his wife left him, same as mine. I shouldn't have borne down so hard on him. I have a lousy temper, always have had." He hesitated, then blurted out as if he had found a confessor: "I said a terrible thing to Ginnie at supper last night. She always has supper with me at the restaurant. I said if she wasn't home when I got home last night that I'd wring her neck."

"And she wasn't home," I said. And somebody wrung her neck, I didn't say.

4.

The light at the highway was red. I glanced at Green. Tear tracks glistened like snail tracks on his face.

"Tell me what happened last night."

"There isn't anything much to tell," he said. "I got to the house about twelve-thirty, and, like you said, she wasn't home. So I called Al Brocco's house. He's my night cook, and I knew his youngest daughter Alice was at the moonlight party

on the beach. Alice was home all right."

"Did you talk to Alice?"

"She was in bed asleep. Al woke her up, but I didn't talk to her. She told him she didn't know where Ginnie was. I went to bed, but I couldn't sleep. Finally I got up and called Mr. Connor. That was about one-thirty. I thought I should get in touch with the authorities, but he said no, Ginnie had enough black marks against her already. He came over to the house and we waited for a while and then we went down to Cavern Beach. There was no trace of her. I said it was time to call in the authorities, and he agreed. We went to his beach house, because it was nearer, and called the sheriff's office from there. We went back to the beach with a couple of flashlights and went through the caves. He stayed with me all night. I give him that."

"Where are these caves?"

"We'll pass them in a minute. I'll show you if you want. But there's nothing in any of the three of them."

Nothing but shadows and empty beer cans, discarded contraceptives, the odor of rotting kelp. I got sand in my shoes and sweat under my collar. The sun dazzled my eyes when I half-walked, half-crawled, from the last of the caves.

Green was waiting beside a heap of ashes.

"This is where they had the wienie roast," he said.

I kicked the ashes. A half-burned sausage rolled along the sand. Sand fleas hopped in the sun like fat on a griddle. Green and I faced each other over the dead fire. He looked out to sea. A seal's face floated like a small black nose cone beyond the breakers. Farther out a water skier slid between unfolding wings of spray.

Away up the beach two people were walking toward us. They were small and lonely and distinct as Chirico figures in the long white distance.

Green squinted against the sun. Red-rimmed or not, his eyes were good. "I believe that's Mr. Connor. I wonder who the woman is with him."

They were walking as close as lovers, just above the white margin of the surf. They pulled apart when they noticed us, but they were still holding hands as they approached.

"It's Mrs. Connor," Green said in a low voice.

"I thought you said she left him."

"That's what he told me last night. She took off on him a couple of weeks ago, couldn't stand a high-school teacher's hours. She must have changed her mind."

She looked as though she had a mind to change. She was a hard-faced blonde who walked like a man. A certain amount of style took the curse off her stiff angularity. She had on a madras shirt, mannishly cut, and a pair of black Capri pants that hugged her long, slim legs. She had good legs.

Connor looked at us in complex embarrassment. "I thought it was you

from a distance, Mr. Green. I don't believe you know my wife."

"I've seen her in my place of business." He explained to the woman: "I run the Highway Restaurant in town."

"How do you do," she said aloofly, then added in an entirely different voice: "You're Virginia's father, aren't you? I'm so sorry."

The words sounded queer. Perhaps it was the surroundings: the ashes on the beach, the entrances to the caves, the sea, and the empty sky which dwarfed us all. Green answered her solemnly.

"Thank you, ma'am. Mr. Connor was a strong right arm to me last night, I can tell you." He was apologizing. And Connor responded:

"Why don't you come to our place for a drink? It's just down the beach. You look as if you could use one, Mr. Green. You, too," he said to me. "I don't believe I know your name."

"Archer. Lew Archer."

He gave me a hard hand. His wife interposed: "I'm sure Mr. Green and his friend won't want to be bothered with us on a day like this. Besides, it isn't even noon yet, Frank."

She was the one who didn't want to be bothered. We stood around for a minute, exchanging grim, nonsensical comments on the beauty of the day. Then she led Connor back in the direction they had come from. Private Property, her attitude seemed to say: Trespassers will be freshfrozen.

I drove Green to the Highway Patrol station. He said that he was feeling better, and could make it home from there by himself. He thanked me profusely for being a friend in need to him, as he put it. He followed me to the door of the station, thanking me.

The dispatcher was cleaning her fingernails with an ivory-handled file. She glanced up eagerly.

"Did they catch him yet?"

"I was going to ask you the same question, Miss Brocco."

"No such luck. But they'll get him," she said with female vindictiveness. "The sheriff called out his air squadron, and he sent to Ventura for bloodhounds."

"Big deal."

She bridled. "What do you mean by that?"

"I don't think the old man of the mountain killed her. If he had, he wouldn't have waited till this morning to go on the lam. He'd have taken off right away."

"Then why did he go on the lam at all?" The word sounded strange in her prim mouth.

"I think he saw me discover the body, and realized he'd be blamed."

She considered this, bending the long nail file between her fingers. "If the old tramp didn't do it, who did?"

"You may be able to help me answer that question."

"Me help you? How?"

"You know Frank Connor, for one thing."

"I know him. I've seen him about my sister's grades a few times."

"You don't seem to like him much."

"I don't like him, I don't dislike him. He's just blah to me."

"Why? What's the matter with him?"

Her tight mouth quivered, and let out words: "*I* don't know what's the matter with him. He can't keep his hands off of young girls."

"How do you know that?"

"I heard it."

"From your sister Alice?"

"Yes. The rumor was going around the school, she said."

"Did the rumor involve Ginnie Green?"

She nodded. Her eyes were as black as fingerprint ink.

"Is that why Connor's wife left him?"

"I wouldn't know about that. I never even laid eyes on Mrs. Connor."

"You haven't been missing much."

There was a yell outside, a kind of choked ululation. It sounded as much like an animal as a man. It was Green. When I reached the door, he was climbing out of his convertible with a heavy blue revolver in his hand.

"I saw the killer," he cried out exultantly.

"Where?"

He waved the revolver toward the lumberyard across the road. "He poked his head up behind that pile of white pine. When he saw me, he ran like a deer. I'm going to get him."

"No. Give me the gun."

"Why? I got a license to carry it. And use it."

He started across the four-lane highway, dodging through the moving patterns of the Sunday traffic as if he were playing parcheesi on the kitchen table at home. The sounds of brakes and curses split the air. He had scrambled over the locked gate of the yard before I got to it. I went over after him.

5.

Green disappeared behind a pile of lumber. I turned the corner and saw him running halfway down a long aisle walled with stacked wood and floored with beaten earth. The old man of the mountain was running ahead of him. His white hair blew in the wind of his own movement. A burlap sack bounced on his shoulders like a load of sorrow and shame.

"Stop or I'll shoot!" Green cried.

The old man ran on as if the devil himself were after him. He came to a cyclone fence, discarded his sack, and tried to climb it. He almost got over. Three strands of barbed wire along the top of the fence caught and held him struggling.

I heard a tearing sound, and then the sound of a shot. The huge old body espaliered on the fence twitched and went limp, fell heavily to the earth. Green stood over him breathing through his teeth.

I pushed him out of the way. The old man was alive, though there was blood in his mouth. He spat it onto his chin when I lifted his head.

"You shouldn't ought to of done it. I come to turn myself in. Then I got ascairt."

"Why were you scared?"

"I watched you uncover the little girl in the leaves. I knew I'd be blamed. I'm one of the chosen. They always blame the chosen. I been in trouble before."

"Trouble with girls?" At my shoulder Green was grinning terribly.

"Trouble with cops."

"For killing people?" Green said.

"For preaching on the street without a license. The voice told me to preach to the tribes of the wicked. And the voice told me this morning to come in and give my testimony."

"What voice?"

"The great voice." His voice was little and weak. He coughed red.

"He's as crazy as a bedbug," Green said.

"Shut up." I turned back to the dying man. "What testimony do you have to give?"

"About the car I seen. It woke me up in the middle of the night, stopped in the road below my sanctuary."

"What kind of car?"

"I don't know cars. I think it was one of them foreign cars. It made a noise to wake the dead."

"Did you see who was driving it?"

"No. I didn't go near. I was ascairt."

"What time was this car in the road?"

"I don't keep track of time. The moon was down behind the trees."

Those were his final words. He looked up at the sky with his sky-colored eyes, straight into the sun. His eyes changed color.

Green said: "Don't tell them. If you do, I'll make a liar out of you. I'm a respected citizen in this town. I got a business to lose. And they'll believe me ahead of you, mister."

"Shut up."

He couldn't. "The old fellow was lying, anyway. You know that. You heard him say yourself that he heard voices. That proves that he's a psycho. He's a psycho killer. I shot him down like you would a mad dog, and I did right."

He waved the revolver.

"You did wrong, Green, and you know it. Give me that gun before it kills somebody else."

He thrust it into my hand suddenly. I unloaded it, breaking my fingernails in the process, and handed it back to him empty. He nudged up against me.

"Listen, maybe I did do wrong. I had provocation. It doesn't have to get out. I got a business to lose."

He fumbled in his hip pocket and brought out a thick sharkskin wallet. "Here. I can pay you good money. You say that you're a private eye; you know how to keep your lip buttoned."

I walked away and left him blabbering beside the body of the man he had killed. They were both victims, in a sense, but only one of them had blood on his hands.

Miss Brocco was in the HP parking lot. Her bosom was jumping with excitement.

"I heard a shot."

"Green shot the old man. Dead. You better send in for the meat wagon and call off your bloody dogs."

The words hit her like slaps. She raised her hand to her face, defensively. "Are you mad at me? Why are you mad at me?"

"I'm mad at everybody."

"You still don't think he did it."

"I know damned well he didn't. I want to talk to your sister."

"Alice? What for?"

"Information. She was on the beach with Ginnie Green last night. She may be able to tell me something."

"You leave Alice alone."

"I'll treat her gently. Where do you live?"

"I don't want my little sister dragged into this filthy mess."

"All I want to know is who Ginnie paired off with."

"I'll ask Alice. I'll tell you."

"Come on, Miss Brocco, we're wasting time. I don't need your permission to talk to your sister, after all. I can get the address out of the phone book if I have to."

She flared up and then flared down.

"You win. We live on Orlando Street, 224. That's on the other side of town. You will be nice to Alice, won't you? She's bothered enough as it is about Ginnie's death."

"She really was a friend of Ginnie's, then?"

"Yes. I tried to break it up. But you know how kids are—two motherless girls, they stick together. I tried to be like a mother to Alice."

"What happened to your own mother?"

"Father— I mean, she died." A greenish pallor invaded her face and turned it to old bronze. "Please. I don't want to talk about it. I was only a kid when she died."

She went back to her muttering radios. She was quite a woman, I thought as I drove away. Nubile but unmarried, probably full of untapped Mediterranean passions. If she worked an eight-hour shift and started at eight, she'd be getting off about four.

It wasn't a large town, and it wasn't far across it. The highway doubled as its main street. I passed the Union High School. On the green playing field beside it a lot of kids in mortarboards and gowns were rehearsing their graduation exercises. A kind of pall seemed to hang over the field. Perhaps it was in my mind.

Farther along the street I passed Green's Highway Restaurant. A dozen cars stood in its parking space. A couple of white-uniformed waitresses were scooting around behind the plate-glass windows.

Orlando Street was a lower-middle-class residential street bisected by the highway. Jacaranda trees bloomed like low small purple clouds among its stucco and frame cottages. Fallen purple petals carpeted the narrow lawn in front of the Brocco house.

A thin, dark man, wiry under his T-shirt, was washing a small red Fiat in the driveway beside the front porch. He must have been over fifty,

but his long hair was as black as an Indian's. His Sicilian nose was humped in the middle by an old break.

"Mr. Brocco?"

"That's me."

"Is your daughter Alice home?"

"She's home."

"I'd like to speak to her."

He turned off his hose, pointing its dripping nozzle at me like a gun.

"You're a little old for her, ain't you?"

"I'm a detective investigating the death of Ginnie Green."

"Alice don't know nothing about that."

"I've just been talking to your older daughter at the Highway Patrol office. She thinks Alice may know something."

He shifted on his feet. "Well, if Anita says it's all right."

"It's okay, Dad," a girl said from the front door. "Anita just called me on the telephone. Come in, Mister—Archer, isn't it?"

"Archer."

6.

She opened the screen door for me. It opened directly into a small square living room containing worn green frieze furniture and a television set which the girl switched off. She was a handsome, serious-looking girl, a younger version of her sister with ten years and ten pounds subtracted and a pony tail added. She sat down gravely on the edge of a chair, waving her hand at the chesterfield. Her movements were languid. There were blue depressions under her eyes. Her face was sallow.

"What kind of questions do you want to ask me? My sister didn't say."

"Who was Ginnie with last night?"

"Nobody. I mean, she was with me. She didn't make out with any of the boys." She glanced from me to the blind television set, as if she felt caught between. "It said on the television that she was with a man, that there was medical evidence to prove it. But I didn't see her with no man. Any man."

"Did Ginnie go with men?"

She shook her head. Her pony tail switched and hung limp. She was close to tears.

"You told Anita she did."

"I did not!"

"Your sister wouldn't lie. You passed on a rumor to her—a high-school rumor that Ginnie had had something to do with one man in particular."

The girl was watching my face in fascination. Her eyes were like a bird's eyes, bright and shallow and fearful.

"Was the rumor true?"

She shrugged her thin shoulders. "How would I know?"

"You were good friends with Ginnie."

"Yes. I was." Her voice broke on the past tense. "She was a real nice kid, even if she was kind of boy crazy."

"She was boy crazy, but she didn't make out with any of the boys last night."

"Not while I was there."

"Did she make out with Mr. Connor?"

"No. He wasn't there. He went away. He said he was going home. He lives up the beach."

"What did Ginnie do?"

"I don't know. I didn't notice."

"You said she was with you. Was she with you all evening?"

"Yes." Her face was agonized. "I mean no."

"Did Ginnie go away, too?"

She nodded.

"In the same direction Mr. Connor took? The direction of his house?"

Her head moved almost imperceptibly downward.

"What time was that, Alice?"

"About eleven o'clock, I guess."

"And Ginnie never came back from Mr. Connor's house?"

"I don't know. I don't know for certain that she went there."

"But Ginnie and Mr. Connor were good friends?"

"I guess so."

"How good? Like a boy friend and a girl friend?"

She sat mute, her birdlike stare unblinking.

"Tell me, Alice."

"I'm afraid."

"Afraid of Mr. Connor?"

"No. Not him."

"Has someone threatened you—told you not to talk?"

Her head moved in another barely perceptible nod.

"Who threatened you, Alice? You'd better tell me for your own protection. Whoever did threaten you is probably a murderer."

She burst into frantic tears. Brocco came to the door.

"What goes on in here?"

"Your daughter is upset. I'm sorry."

"Yeah, and I know who upset her. You better get out of here or you'll be sorrier."

He opened the screen door and held it open, his head poised like a dark and broken ax. I went out past him. He spat after me. The Broccos were a very emotional family.

I started back toward Connor's beach house on the south side of town but ran into a diversion on the way. Green's car was parked in the lot beside his restaurant. I went in.

The place smelled of grease. It was almost full of late Sunday lunchers seated in booths and at the U-shaped breakfast bar in the middle. Green himself was sitting on a stool behind the cash register counting money. He was counting it as if his life and his hope of heaven depended on the colored paper in his hands.

He looked up, smiling loosely and vaguely. "Yes, sir?" Then he recognized me. His face went through a quick series of transformations and settled for a kind of boozy shame. "I know I shouldn't be here working on a day like this. But it keeps my mind off my troubles. Besides, they steal you blind if you don't watch 'em. And I'll be needing the money."

"What for, Mr. Green?"

"The trial." He spoke the word as if it gave him a bitter satisfaction.

"Whose trial?"

"Mine. I told the sheriff what the old guy said. And what I did. I know what I did. I shot him down like a dog, and I had no right to. I was crazy with my sorrow, you might say."

He was less crazy now. The shame in his eyes was clearing. But the sorrow was still there in their depths like stone at the bottom of a well.

"I'm glad you told the truth, Mr. Green."

"So am I. It doesn't help him, and it doesn't bring Ginnie back. But at least I can live with myself."

"Speaking of Ginnie," I said. "Was she seeing quite a lot of Frank Connor?"

"Yeah. I guess you could say so. He came over to help her with her studies quite a few times. At the house, and at the library. He didn't charge me any tuition, either."

"That was nice of him. Was Ginnie fond of Connor?"

"Sure she was. She thought very highly of Mr. Connor."

"Was she in love with him?"

"In love? Hell, I never thought of anything like that. Why?"

"Did she have dates with Connor?"

"Not to my knowledge," he said. "If she did, she must have done it behind my back." His eyes narrowed to two red swollen slits. "You think Frank Connor had something to do with her death?"

"It's a possibility. Don't go into a sweat now. You know where that gets you."

"Don't worry. But what about this Connor? Did you get something on him? I thought he was acting queer last night."

"Queer in what way?"

"Well, he was pretty tight when he came to the house. I gave him a stiff snort, and that straightened him out for a while. But later on, down on the beach, he got almost hysterical. He was running around like a rooster with his head chopped off."

"Is he a heavy drinker?"

"I wouldn't know. I never saw him drink before last night at my house." Green narrowed his eyes. "But he tossed down a triple bourbon like it was water. And remember this morning, he offered us a drink on the beach. A drink in the morning, that isn't the usual thing, especially for a high-school teacher."

"I noticed that."

"What else have you been noticing?"

"We won't go into it now," I said. "I don't want to ruin a man unless and until I'm sure he's got it coming."

He sat on his stool with his head down. Thought moved murkily under his knitted brows. His glance fell on the money in his hands. He was counting tens.

"Listen, Mr. Archer. You're working on this case on your own, aren't you? For free?"

"So far."

"So go to work for me. Nail Connor for me, and I'll pay you whatever you ask."

"Not so fast," I said. "We don't

know that Connor is guilty. There are other possibilities."

"Such as?"

"If I tell you, can I trust you not to go on a shooting spree?"

"Don't worry," he repeated. "I've had that."

"Where's your revolver?"

"I turned it in to Sheriff Pearsall. He asked for it."

We were interrupted by a family group getting up from one of the booths. They gave Green their money and their sympathy. When they were out of hearing, I said:

"You mentioned that your daughter worked here in the restaurant for a while. Was Al Brocco working here at the same time?"

"Yeah. He's been my night cook for six-seven years. Al is a darned good cook. He trained as a chef on the Italian line." His slow mind, punchy with grief, did a double-take. "You wouldn't be saying that he messed around with Ginnie?"

"I'm asking you."

"Shucks, Al is old enough to be her father. He's all wrapped up in his own girls, Anita in particular. He worships the ground she walks on. She's the mainspring of that family."

"How did he get on with Ginnie?"

"Very well. They kidded back and forth. She was the only one who could ever make him smile. Al is a sad man, you know. He had a tragedy in his life."

"His wife's death?"

"It was worse than that," Green said. "Al Brocco killed his wife with his own hand. He caught her with another man and put a knife in her."

"And he's walking around loose?"

"The other man was a Mex," Green said in an explanatory way. "A wetback. He couldn't even talk the English language. The town hardly blamed Al, the jury gave him manslaughter. But when he got out of the pen, the people at the Pink Flamingo wouldn't give him his old job back—he used to be chef there. So I took him on. I felt sorry for his girls, I guess, and Al's been a good worker. A man doesn't do a thing like that twice, you know."

He did another slow mental double-take. His mouth hung open. I could see the gold in its corners.

"Let's hope not."

"Listen here," he said. "You go to work for me, eh? You nail the guy, whoever he is. I'll pay you. I'll pay you now. How much do you want?"

I took a hundred dollars of his money and left him trying to comfort himself with the rest of it. The smell of grease stayed in my nostrils.

7.

Connor's house clung to the edge of a low bluff about halfway between the HP station and the mouth of the canyon where the thing had begun: a semi-cantilevered redwood cottage with a closed double garage fronting the highway. From the grape stake-fenced patio in the angle between the garage and the front door a flight of wooden steps climbed to the flat roof, which was railed as a sun deck. A second set of steps descend-

ed the fifteen or twenty feet to the beach.

I tripped on a pair of garden shears crossing the patio to the garage window. I peered into the interior twilight. Two things inside interested me: a dismasted flattie sitting on a trailer, and a car. The sailboat interested me because its cordage resembled the white rope that had strangled Ginnie. The car interested me because it was an imported model, a low-slung Triumph two-seater.

I was planning to have a closer look at it when a woman's voice screeked overhead like a gull's:

"What do you think you're doing?"

Mrs. Connor was leaning over the railing on the roof. Her hair was in curlers. She looked like a blond Gorgon. I smiled up at her, the way that Greek whose name I don't remember must have smiled.

"Your husband invited me for a drink, remember? I don't know whether he gave me a rain check or not."

"He did not! Go away! My husband is sleeping!"

"Shh. You'll wake him up. You'll wake up the people in Forest Lawn."

She put her hand to her mouth. From the expression on her face she seemed to be biting her hand. She disappeared for a moment, and then came down the steps with a multicolored silk scarf over her curlers. The rest of her was sheathed in a white satin bathing suit. Against it her flesh looked like brown wood.

"You get out of here," she said. "Or I shall call the police."

"Fine. Call them. I've got nothing to hide."

"Are you implying that we have?"

"We'll see. Why did you leave your husband?"

"That's none of your business."

"I'm making it my business, Mrs. Connor. I'm a detective investigating the murder of Ginnie Green. Did you leave Frank on account of Ginnie Green?"

"No. No! I wasn't even aware—" Her hand went to her mouth again. She chewed on it some more.

"You weren't aware that Frank was having an affair with Ginnie Green?"

"He wasn't."

"So you say. Others say different."

"What others? Anita Brocco? You can't believe anything *that* woman says. Why, her own father is a murderer, everybody in town knows that."

"Your own husband may be another, Mrs. Connor. You might as well come clean with me."

"But I have nothing to tell you."

"You can tell me why you left him."

"That is a private matter, between Frank and me. It has nothing to do with anybody but us." She was calming down, setting her moral forces in a stubborn, defensive posture.

"There's usually only the one reason."

"I had my reasons. I said they were none of your business. I chose

for reasons of my own to spend a month with my parents in Long Beach."

"When did you come back?"

"This morning."

"Why this morning?"

"Frank called me. He said he needed me." She touched her thin breast absently, pathetically, as if perhaps she hadn't been much needed in the past.

"Needed you for what?"

"As his wife," she said. "He said there might be tr—" Her hand went to her mouth again. She said around it: "Trouble."

"Did he name the kind of trouble?"

"No."

"What time did he call you?"

"Very early, around seven o'clock."

"That was more than an hour before I found Ginnie's body."

"He knew she was missing. He spent the whole night looking for her."

"Why would he do that, Mrs. Connor?"

"She was his student. He was fond of her. Besides, he was more or less responsible for her."

"Responsible for her death?"

"How dare you say a thing like that?"

"If he dared to do it, I can dare to say it."

"He didn't!" she cried. "Frank is a good man. He may have his faults, but he wouldn't kill anyone. I know him."

"What are his faults?"

"We won't discuss them."

"Then may I have a look in your garage?"

"What for? What are you looking for?"

"I'll know when I find it." I turned toward the garage door.

"You mustn't go in there," she said intensely. "Not without Frank's permission."

"Wake him up and we'll get his permission."

"I will not. He got no sleep last night."

"Then I'll just have a look without his permission."

"I'll kill you if you go in there."

She picked up the garden shears and brandished them at me—a sick-looking lioness defending her overgrown cub. The cub himself opened the front door of the cottage. He slouched in the doorway groggily, naked except for white shorts.

"What goes on, Stella?"

"This man has been making the most horrible accusations."

His blurred glance wavered between us and focused on her. "What did he say?"

"I won't repeat it."

"I will, Mr. Connor. I think you were Ginnie Green's lover, if that's the word. I think she followed you to this house last night, around midnight. I think she left it with a rope around her neck."

Connor's head jerked. He started to make a move in my direction. Something inhibited it, like an invisible leash. His body slanted toward me, static, all the muscles taut.

It resembled an anatomy specimen with the skin off. Even his face seemed mostly bone and teeth.

I hoped he'd swing on me and let me hit him. He didn't. Stella Connor dropped the garden shears. They made a noise like the dull clank of doom.

"Aren't you going to deny it, Frank?"

"I didn't kill her. I swear I didn't. I admit that we—that we were together last night, Ginnie and I."

"Ginnie and I?" the woman repeated incredulously.

His head hung down. "I'm sorry, Stella. I didn't want to hurt you more than I have already. But it has to come out. I took up with the girl after you left. I was lonely and feeling sorry for myself. Ginnie kept hanging around. One night I drank too much and let it happen. It happened more than once. I was so flattered that a pretty young girl—"

"You fool!" she said in a deep, harsh voice.

"Yes, I'm a moral fool. That's no surprise to you, is it?"

"I thought you respected your pupils, at least. You mean to say you brought her into our own house, into our own bed?"

"You'd left. It wasn't ours any more. Besides, she came of her own accord. She wanted to come. She loved me."

She said with grinding contempt: "You poor, groveling ninny. And to think you had the gall to ask me to come back here, to make you look respectable."

I cut in between them. "Was she here last night, Connor?"

"She was here. I didn't invite her. I wanted her to come, but I dreaded it, too. I knew that I was taking an awful chance. I drank quite a bit to numb my conscience—"

"What conscience?" Stella Connor said.

"I have a conscience," he said without looking at her. "You don't know the hell I've been going through. After she came, after it happened last night, I drank myself unconscious."

"Do you mean after you killed her?" I said.

"I didn't kill her. When I passed out, she was perfectly all right. She was sitting up drinking a cup of instant coffee. The next thing I knew, hours later, her father was on the telephone, and she was gone."

"Are you trying to pull the old blackout alibi? You'll have to do better than that."

"I can't. It's the truth."

"Let me into your garage."

He seemed almost glad to be given an order, a chance for some activity. The garage wasn't locked. He raised the overhead door and let the daylight into the interior. It smelled of paint. There were empty cans of marine paint on a bench beside the sailboat. Its hull gleamed virgin white.

"I painted my flattie last week," he said inconsequentially.

"You do a lot of sailing?"

"I used to. Not much lately."

"No," his wife said from the door-

way. "Frank changed his hobby to women. Wine and women."

"Lay off, eh?" His voice was pleading.

She looked at him from a great and stony distance.

8.

I walked around the boat, examining the cordage. The starboard jib line had been sheared off short. Comparing it with the port line, I found that the missing piece was approximately a yard long. That was the length of the piece of white rope that I was interested in.

"Hey!" Connor grabbed the end of the cut line. He fingered it as if it was a wound in his own flesh. "Who's been messing with my lines? Did you cut it, Stella?"

"I never go near your blessed boat," she said.

"I can tell you where the rest of that line is, Connor. A line of similar length and color and thickness was wrapped around Ginnie Green's neck when I found her."

"Surely you don't believe I put it there?"

I tried to, but I couldn't. Smallboat sailors don't cut their jib lines, even when they're contemplating murder. And while Connor was clearly no genius, he was smart enough to have known that the line could easily be traced to him. Perhaps someone else had been equally smart.

I turned to Mrs. Connor. She was standing in the doorway with her legs apart. Her body was almost black against the daylight. Her eyes were hooded by the scarf on her head.

"What time did you get home, Mrs. Connor?"

"About ten o'clock this morning. I took a bus as soon as my husband called. But I'm in no position to give him an alibi."

"An alibi wasn't what I had in mind. I suggest another possibility, that you came home twice. You came home unexpectedly last night, saw the girl in the house with your husband, waited in the dark till the girl came out, waited with a piece of rope in your hands—a piece of rope you'd cut from your husband's boat in the hope of getting him punished for what he'd done to you. But the picture doesn't fit the frame, Mrs. Connor. A sailor like your husband wouldn't cut a piece of line from his own boat. And even in the heat of murder he wouldn't tie a granny's knot. His fingers would automatically tie a reef knot. That isn't true of a woman's fingers."

She held herself upright with one long, rigid arm against the doorframe.

"I wouldn't do anything like that. I wouldn't do that to Frank."

"Maybe you wouldn't in daylight, Mrs. Connor. Things have different shapes at midnight."

"And hell hath no fury like a woman scorned? Is that what you're thinking? You're wrong. I wasn't here last night. I was in bed in my father's house in Long Beach. I didn't

even know about that girl and Frank."

"Then why did you leave him?"

"He was in love with another woman. He wanted to divorce me and marry her. But he was afraid—afraid that it would affect his position in town. He told me on the phone this morning that it was all over with the other woman. So I agreed to come back to him." Her arm dropped to her side.

"He said that it was all over with Ginnie?"

Possibilities were racing through my mind. There was the possibility that Connor had been playing reverse English, deliberately and clumsily framing himself in order to be cleared. But that was out of far left field.

"Not Ginnie," his wife said. "The other woman was Anita Brocco. He met her last spring in the course of work and fell in love—what *he* calls in love. My husband is a foolish, fickle man."

"Please, Stella. I said it was all over between me and Anita, and it is."

She turned on him in quiet savagery. "What does it matter now? If it isn't one girl it's another. Any kind of female flesh will do to poultice your sick little ego."

Her cruelty struck inward and hurt her. She stretched out her hand toward him. Suddenly her eyes were blind with tears.

"Any flesh but mine, Frank," she said brokenly.

Connor paid no attention to his wife.

He said to me in a hushed voice:

"My God, I never thought. I noticed her car last night when I was walking home along the beach."

"Whose car?"

"Anita's red Fiat. It was parked at the viewpoint a few hundred yards from here." He gestured vaguely toward town. "Later, when Ginnie was with me, I thought I heard someone in the garage. But I was too drunk to make a search." His eyes burned into mine. "You say a woman tied that knot?"

"All we can do is ask her."

We started toward my car together. His wife called after him:

"Don't go, Frank. Let him handle it."

He hesitated, a weak man caught between opposing forces.

"I need you," she said. "We need each other."

I pushed him in her direction.

9.

It was nearly four when I got to the HP station. The patrol cars had gathered like homing pigeons for the change in shift. Their uniformed drivers were talking and laughing inside.

Anita Brocco wasn't among them. A male dispatcher, a fat-faced man with pimples, had taken her place behind the counter.

"Where's Miss Brocco?" I asked.

"In the ladies' room. Her father is coming to pick her up any minute."

She came out wearing lipstick and a light beige coat. Her face turned

beige when she saw my face. She came toward me in slow motion, leaned with both hands flat on the counter. Her lipstick looked like fresh blood on a corpse.

"You're a handsome woman, Anita. Too bad about you."

"Too bad." It was half a statement and half a question. She looked down at her hands.

"Your fingernails are clean now. They were dirty this morning. You were digging in the dirt in the dark last night, weren't you?"

"No."

"You were, though. You saw them together and you couldn't stand it. You waited in ambush with a rope, and put it around her neck. Around your own neck, too."

She touched her neck. The talk and laughter had subsided around us. I could hear the tick of the clock again, and the muttering signals coming in from inner space.

"What did you use to cut the rope with, Anita? The garden shears?"

Her red mouth groped for words and found them. "I was crazy about him. She took him away. It was all over before it started. I didn't know what to do with myself. I wanted him to suffer."

"He's suffering. He's going to suffer more."

"He deserves to. He was the only man—" She shrugged in a twisted way and looked down at her breast. "I didn't want to kill her, but when I saw them together—I saw them through the window. I saw her take off her clothes and put them on. Then I thought of the night my father—when he—when there was all the blood in Mother's bed. I had to wash it out of the sheets."

The men around me were murmuring. One of them, a sergeant, raised his voice.

"Did you kill Ginnie Green?"

"Yes."

"Are you ready to make a statement?" I said.

"Yes. I'll talk to Sheriff Pearsall. I don't want to talk here, in front of my friends." She looked around doubtfully.

"I'll take you downtown."

"Wait a minute." She glanced once more at her empty hands. "I left my purse in the—in the back room. I'll go and get it."

She crossed the office like a zombie, opened a plain door, closed it behind her. She didn't come out. After a while we broke the lock and went in after her.

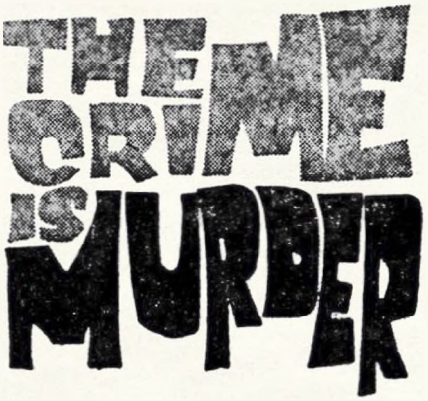
Her body was cramped on the narrow floor. The ivory-handled nail file lay by her right hand. There were bloody holes in her white blouse and in the white breast under it. One of them had gone as deep as her heart.

Later Al Brocco drove up in her red Fiat and came into the station.

"I'm a little late," he said to the room in general. "Anita wanted me to give her car a good cleaning. Where is she, anyway?"

The sergeant cleared his throat to answer Brocco.

All us poor creatures, as the old man of the mountain had said that morning.



ON A DAY UNKNOWN

ANTHONY BOUCHER

August Sangret, you are charged for that you, on a day unknown in the month of September, 1942, at Thursley, in this county, murdered Joan Pearl Wolfe.

THIS UNCONVENTIONAL FORM OF ARraignment was necessitated by the condition of the body, which had been crudely buried for some three weeks. It was Private William Moore of the Royal Marines who found it, on October 7, 1942. On military duty on Hankley Common, Thursley, he saw a hand protruding from one of the mounds on the common. The hand had probably been jarred loose by the passage of heavy military vehicles. Private Moore called a sergeant, who called a lieutenant, who called the Surrey Constabulary, who called Dr. Keith Simpson and Dr. Eric Gardner, two of England's greatest forensic pathologists.

The case was a splendid challenge to a pathologist; indeed it has been called the foremost triumph of forensic medicine since the Ruxton case of 1935, in which Dr. John Glaister and others solved the jigsaw puzzle of two female bodies which a Hindu physician had chopped into small pieces and strewn about the landscape. The body on Hankley Common was at least all in one place, if not quite in one piece; parts of it were mummified, other parts were completely eaten away. (Dr. Gardner, a precise man, noted that they removed two buckets of maggots before beginning the autopsy.) The most that could be determined as to identity was that the body had been young and female. There was no flesh left on the skull; and it was impossible to tell whether she had been pregnant or whether she had been raped. But it was quite possible to prove that she had been murdered.

Indeed the doctors were able to reconstruct the crime in some detail. She had been cut severely about the head and arms (presumably raised in self-protection); then she had been knocked to the ground, flat on her face, and her skull had been crushed by a powerful blow with a stick; afterward the body had been dragged along the ground. A stick found nearby fitted the skull injuries exactly. The knife must have been a peculiar one, with an odd hooked point.

The pathologists performed a notable job of reconstruction on the shattered skull and it was later introduced in evidence—the first time that the actual skull of the victim had been introduced as an exhibit

in an English court. The jury took it with them when they retired to deliberate. (. . . *thou shell of death,/ Once the bright face of my betrothed lady,/ When life and beauty naturally fill'd out/ These ragged imperfections . . .*)

Whether Joan Wolfe actually possessed beauty is doubtful; life she certainly enjoyed in abundance for as long as it was permitted to her. No photographs of her have survived; we do know that she had protruding teeth and dyed and redyed hair, but no male seems to have minded.

She was born on March 11, 1923, and lived to be nineteen and a half. She once said she was born in Germany; but she was talking to a German at the time, and amiability was always more important to Joan than facts. She was certainly English in speech and background, if of an English minority. The Wolfes were Roman Catholics, and Joan spent thirteen and a half years "in a very strict Catholic school." She was devout and neither drank nor smoked.

The date is uncertain, but probably when she was sixteen her father committed suicide (by gas) and her mother remarried. Joan's attitudes toward her two parents seem to have been everything a Freudian might wish. She left her home (which was geographically in Tunbridge Wells and spiritually in Mycenae) and threw herself upon the world, which welcomed her enthusiastically. Several times she made the attempt to go home again, but the duration of her visits grew shorter and shorter. Her last, in June of 1942, was for a matter of hours.

This was wartime—that black period of the war when, as a German general has written: "the German command had reached the zenith of its success." England, half-expecting invasion while herself preparing to invade, was crowded with troops of all nationalities, and Joan became what used to be called a camp follower.

She wore lace-trimmed knickers (panties, to Americans) and a bra under a green-and-white dress with a long skirt and short sleeves. She wore dark, low-heeled shoes (with contrasting laces) and red-white-and-blue socks. Over her very short-cropped hair she wore a pink kerchief.

This extraordinarily pied outfit was all she possessed in the way of clothing. It was the costume in which everybody knew her and in which she was literally found dead. She had last left home thus attired; and her mum (now Mrs. Watts) refused to send her either her clothes or her clothing ration books. Instead, Mum wrote her pious and injured letters, begging her to cure herself of venereal disease (which, by some miracle, she did not have), and attempting to lure her home with such adjurations as: "Joan, please think before it is too late and remember remorse is the worst thing in the world to bear. When I am dead you will think about all this,

and wish that you had been a better girl to me, so before it is too late, Joan, try hard to alter, won't you? . . . I am still praying every night for you, Joan." The letters had the effect that might be expected.

Joan settled into something like an engagement with a Canadian soldier named Francis. He even gave her a wedding ring. But Francis was sent back to Canada, and they parted without marriage or any specific plans for marriage. And that same week, still wearing Francis' ring, she met August Sangret.

Her capacious handbag did not contain cigarettes or a flask or contraceptives. It did contain a New Testament, a crucifix, a rosary, a devotional pamphlet, her National Health card, a piece of soap, a number of letters from and to soldiers (she seems to have sometimes asked for her own letters back, and carried them with her), and photographs of several soldiers and of her dead father.

"You may think," said Eric Neve, K.C., at the trial, with British understatement, "upon the evidence that you hear that she would not perhaps be incorrectly described as being somewhat wayward." Her mother, without being asked, volunteered the statement: "I would describe her as being a wayward girl and a bit of a trial." Superintendent Richard Webb, of the Surrey Constabulary, who had had his problems with Joan and her soldiers, closed the prosecution case by saying: "She was a very well-spoken and a very quiet-spoken girl. When you spoke to her you got the impression that she was a good-living girl by the way she spoke. She had a very charming way."

August Sangret was born on August 28, 1913; he was twenty-eight when he met Joan Wolfe and twenty-nine when he was hanged. He was born and raised in Battleford, Saskatchewan. Mr. Justice Macnaghten, in his summing up, mysteriously described his as having come "from the far east of Canada to fight our common foe." Actually Saskatchewan is a western province, and Battleford (a town then of a little more than a thousand in population, adjoining the larger North Battleford) is almost due north of Billings, Montana.

Both of his parents were *métis*—that is, Canadians of mixed French and Indian (in this case Cree) blood. Saskatchewan knew the *métis* well: they had been arbitrarily dispossessed of their lands when the French lost dominion over Canada, and had staged unsuccessful rebellions in 1869 and 1885. At home the Sangrets spoke their own patois, a mixture of Cree and English with a dollop of French; but August (surely this was originally Auguste?) spoke plain English well enough, if, as he confessed, "there are some big words I cannot understand."

He was, however, totally and literally illiterate. Saskatchewan has free and compulsory public education, but Sangret never attended any kind of school at any time, and was unable to read or write. He was at

least nominally a Roman Catholic.

Through his early twenties he worked as a farm laborer in Maidstone, Saskatchewan. At this period Saskatchewan, pre-eminently an agricultural province, was suffering an even worse depression than most of the world. The economic factors were aggravated by severe drought and dust storms. We can imagine that his work was sporadic and badly paid; we know that he got into occasional trouble with the law. When he was eighteen, he served six months for violent assault; six years later he drew three months for threatening to shoot a woman of whom he was jealous. He also had convictions for the standard depression-era crimes of vagrancy and theft.

From 1935 to 1939 Sangret served in the Battleford Light Infantry, a militia regiment which trained two weeks in the year; and on June 19, 1940, he enlisted in the Regina Rifles of the regular Canadian Army. (In October, 1942, he was still a buck private.) He was sent to England in March of 1942, and in July he was assigned to the Canadian Education Company, stationed at 103 Camp, Witley, Surrey.

The Education Company did not achieve much with Sangret; after three months his instructor stated, "He can just barely write the A B C." But he kept up quite a correspondence, inducing his fellow soldiers to read his letters to him and to take down the dictated replies. The letters were mostly from women: women left behind in Canada, who regularly sent him presents ("fudge, razor blades, perfume, and shaving cream. I use perfume," he said); women whom he'd met in Glasgow on leave and hoped to see again soon. His taste seemed to run to mature women, widowed or separated from their husbands.

Slow in speech, inarticulate, impassive ("What I mean," said his instructor, "is that it takes a lot to upset an Indian chap"), August Sangret was still a markedly attractive man. The Cree of his ancestry predominated in his bronze skin, black hair, strong and regular features. Molly Lefebure, pathologist Simpson's secretary, was much taken with him—especially on the post-mortem table where she could observe that he was "muscular, well built, almost good enough for one of Fenimore Cooper's novels." A great deal of nonsense was later to be written about Sangret's "savage heritage," even to hints that the burial of the corpse followed some arcane tribal ritual; but there is little doubt that he looked, at least, satisfactorily like the romantic concept of the Noble Savage, complete with handsome poker face.

On Friday, July 17, 1942, August Sangret and Joan Wolfe met in a pub in Godalming. (Geographical note: All the places mentioned—Godalming and Guildford and Witley and Thursley—are close together, within a radius of about ten miles, in the southwest corner of Surrey,

which is the county directly southwest of London.) Sangret himself has described the meeting:

"I ordered another pint of beer and as I went to sit down a girl entered. . . . She bought a glass of lemonade for herself and came and sat alongside of me. I said 'Good evening' to her, and 'Will you have a drink?' She said 'No.' " But they got to talking, mostly about Francis and the abandoned wedding plans, "and after about half an hour I asked Joan to come for a walk with me. She agreed, and I took her to the park," where they talked about her father's suicide and her mother's enmity. "After about an hour had passed I suggested going for a walk and we left the park and walked up the hill to some grassland where we sat down. We started kissing and cuddling and I asked her if she would 'go with me.' I mean by this that I wanted to have connexions with her. She did not refuse in any way and I had connexions with her. I did not use a French letter and I just did it the natural way."

(Throughout, both in his long statement to the police and later on the witness stand, *connexions* is the normally monosyllabic Sangret's only word for sexual intercourse. One imagines that it was suggested by a police stenographer.)

"After this we got up and walked back to Godalming Railway Station. . . . I gave her my address at the camp, and she promised to write to me. We did not make any arrangements to meet again."

She did not write; but they did meet again, on the following Tuesday. It was purely by chance. Sangret and another Canadian soldier were standing outside a fish-and-chips shop in Godalming when Joan came along and stopped to talk. They talked for so long that a suspicious policeman interrupted and carried Joan off to the police station for questioning—presumably on suspicion of soliciting, which was markedly unjust to Joan's amateur generosity. Sangret went with her, and after she was released "we walked to the grassland where we had previously been and again we had connexions." This time they arranged to meet again the next day, but Joan did not turn up. She had fainted in the street and been taken to a hospital in Guildford.

Something over and above "connexions" had deepened their relationship on this second meeting. She wrote him from the Warren Road Hospital, "I have your picture on the locker beside me. The nurses know you are my boy friend, they told me to tell you to come and see me." But Sangret's hours away from camp did not fit into hospital visiting hours, and they still had not seen each other when she wrote again, on Sunday, July 26:

"Just one week has passed since I have known you, dear. It seems such a long time. [To be precise, it had been nine days.] . . . I hope you will try and come to see me, as I want to tell you when I can come out because someone will have to meet me, and you are all I have in

the world. Of course if you do not want to come I shall understand, August, but I am sure I shall never understand men. I do not know enough about them, but I can live and learn. Anyway, I am pretty sure we are going to have a tiny wee one, maybe that is why you do not want to come and see me because you think that."

You will remember that Sangret first heard this news in the voice of some slightly more literate fellow student in the Education Company. You can imagine the reader looking up with some surprised and bawdy remark, and Sangret impassively nodding and gesturing to him to read on.

"I hope not anyway, but, dear, I would not blame you if you did not want to marry me, because I am really too young, and too old-fashioned [Mum in Tunbridge Wells would hardly agree] to be married. I regret what we did now it is too late, for I still say it is wicked. I hope God forgives me, for I am truly sorry, and do not want to do anything wrong really. . . . Oh, dear August, why did we do it? You will not want to marry me anyway, because we hardly know one another, and I do not know anything about babies, but I [here the letter is illegible] . . . Well, I suppose I shall have to close this letter now, if I want to get it posted, so au revoir (daddy). God bless you always, dear. Joan."

Was Joan really pregnant? A doctor who examined her in late August was uncertain; the autopsy could not determine the fact because of decay. A missed period made her think so, but this is not conclusive. If she was pregnant, it was more probably by Francis than by Sangret, who had had only one opportunity immediately before the period should have started. But neither of them seems ever to have questioned, from this point on, the facts that she was pregnant and that he was the father.

Released from the hospital sooner than she expected, Joan went out to the camp to find Sangret. "Joan began talking about getting married," he stated, "and I told her I would marry her." They arranged to meet the next night in Godalming, and then (Friday, July 31) began a curious sort of sordid idyll unique in the annals of love.

"I took her to the camp, and sat down in the bracken behind the officers' lines. Joan then told me she had nowhere to live, so I built a small shack from branches of the trees, put my rain cape and my gas cape over the branches, and then covered this with leaves and twigs. I gathered together a lot of leaves, went to my hut and got my blankets, and took them back to the shack. I returned to camp to answer the roll call at ten o'clock and then returned to Joan. During the time we were there she spoke about getting married, and we talked over our plans. I slept with Joan in the shack that night and had connexions with her again."

It was this improvised babes-in-the-woods shack which the press was

later to insist on calling a "wigwam." Sangret never used the word, and it was probably more than a century since his half-French ancestors had lived in the ancient tribal dwellings; but "The Wigwam Murder" made a sensational journalistic catch-phrase.

For more than three weeks Joan slept in this shack and Sangret joined her every night, until they were discovered by a pair of provosts, who routed them with a warning. Sangret simply built another shack/"wigwam," behind the sergeants' lines this time. When the provosts discovered that he was still keeping a woman in camp, Sangret wound up in the guardhouse and Joan was sent back to the hospital in Guildford, which seems to have served also as a sort of detention home for girls who did not quite belong in jail.

This interruption was not without its benefits. The commanding officer turned amiable when he learned that Sangret intended to marry the girl. He explained the technicalities involved, which included getting the consent of the Canadian Army (a long and tedious task) and that of Joan's mother (probably an impossible one, though Joan was optimistic), and gave Sangret £5 to help support the girl in the meantime. The sergeants at the camp began planning a fund for the young couple. And in the hospital Joan could at last enjoy hot baths and a chance to wash her only garments.

But even hot baths pall, and Joan soon slipped out of the hospital to rejoin Sangret—on August 28, his twenty-ninth birthday. This time he found, rather than built, a nest: what he called "an old shed" but was actually the ruined cricket pavilion of Thursley Cricket Ground. ("If one may say so," observed prosecutor Neve at the trial, "it looks a very delightful cricket ground.") There they lived until mid-September.

At night Sangret would buy or scrounge food and bring it to Joan. Sometimes they went blackberrying and ate the berries or sold them to the officers' mess. During the day Joan had time on her hands. At first she got a job, but soon lost it. Then she hung around Godalming in the daytime. But she was more and more drawn to her home (shack or cricket pavilion) and finally spent most of her time there, dreaming and praying and waiting for Sangret and chatting amiably with passing soldiers.

"At first," said Sangret, "when I slept with Joan I used to have connexions with her sometimes two or three times a night and later on sometimes not at all." They had reached a state of intense need to be with each other even in the absence of sexual hunger—which may be one definition of love.

Joan wrote to Sangret from the hospital on August 24, "I will never regret what we have done, we have had some good laughs, and tears, too. (Oh! Burning wood, the loveliest smell in the world.) I will never forget that, will you? . . . I am so used to talking to you, and then lis-

tening to you groaning to yourself because I would not let you sleep. When I turned over I missed you putting your arms around me. I never thought it would be so lonely. . . . We have always been together until now. [For less than a month then; but *always* never dates beyond the beginning of love.] The old fire in the evenings and the blackberries and heaps of little things we used to do. The guards that used to watch us through their field glasses as we walked across the fields through the heather. We have so many things to think about and to laugh at."

Good laughs . . . and tears, too. One night at the pavilion, Sangret stated, "Joan got up and went outside to make water and when she came back she said to me, 'Do you know what I have been doing out there? . . . I have been praying to God. I was asking God, I would like to die.' She was crying, and I said to her, 'That is not a nice thing to wish for.' She said, 'I don't like this suffering, I have no place to live.' "

But in her daylight hours she scribbled happily on the walls of the pavilion: intertwinings of his name and hers (as Mrs. Sangret), crude sketches (such as one labeled *Our little grey home in the West*), scraps of poems, and, from memory, a long prayer beginning *O Holy Virgin in the midst of all thy glory we implore thee not to forget the sorrows of this world. . . .*

Then there was the matter of jealousy. Soldiers would keep passing by, and would feel a not unnatural interest in a girl alone. At least twice Sangret arrived while she was still visiting, once with a Sudeten German and once with an American. Both times he was angry; and in the case of the American, with good cause. Private Deadman, U.S.A. (who thought the cricket grounds were a bowling green), had made quite a definite pass at Joan—which he explained at the trial, with comically incredible highmindedness, as only an attempt to see whether "she was a decent sort of girl"—and been turned down cold. But there was no violence in Sangret's proprietary anger, just an impassive sullenness.

Possibly more serious was Joan's jealousy. Sangret owed a thank-you letter to the woman in Halifax who sent him blades and perfume. With a spectacular absence of tact he asked Joan to write the letter for him. Joan did so, but she was still brooding about it the next morning. "You can't love two," she said, and was not mollified by Sangret's explanation that Mrs. Oak was "more of a friend."

That was Monday morning, September 14—the last time, according to his statement, that Sangret ever saw Joan alive.

On October 8, the day after the finding of the body, Chief Inspector Edward Greeno of New Scotland Yard came down to Surrey.

Molly Lefebure, whose employer, Dr. Simpson, worked frequently with Greeno, has described him on an earlier case in 1941:

"More than anything else he resembled a huge, steel-plated battle cruiser, with his jaw thrust forward instead of a prow. He spoke little, noticing everything, and was tough, not in the Hollywood style, but genuinely, naturally, quietly, appallingly so.

"I found myself misquoting Hilaire Belloc on the subject of the Lion —but it did just as well for Mr. Greeno: *'His eyes they are bright/ And his jaw it is grim,/ And a wise little child/ Will not play with him.'*

". . . He started asking questions in a rather rasping voice that sent shivers down my spine. He was on the warpath, and I thought, 'God help the poor fool he's after.' "

For most of a week, from Monday, October 12, through Friday, October 16, that rasping voice questioned August Sangret. Even at the cost of damaging the novel reader's illusion as to the meticulous chivalry of Scotland Yard, it must be pointed out (because Greeno reluctantly admitted it in cross-examination) that he never, at any point, issued the customary may-be-used-against-you-in-evidence caution, nor did he invite any superior officer to attend this questioning of an illiterate private.

Sangret held up astonishingly well under this treatment. He told and retold the story from which I have often quoted, and insisted that so far as he knew Joan had simply disappeared on September 14. No, he had not made any strenuous effort to find her. (How could he?) Yes, he had made several contradictory remarks to friends who asked, "Where's Joan?" (Who is humble enough to say simply: "She walked out on me"?)

Much has been made of the fact that Sangret seemed aware of Joan's death before he was officially informed. Prosecutor Neve, for instance: "But when he had finished making that statement, he said this: 'I guess you have found her. Everything points to me. I guess I shall get the blame.' You may ask yourselves why he should say that, if he did not in fact know that she was at that moment lying dead, and also know how her death had come about."

You may also ask yourselves just what you would think if a Scotland Yard bigshot grilled you all week on your relations with a missing girl, and asked you to identify, piece by piece, the only clothes you had ever seen her wear.

When the statement was completed (one of the longest statements ever taken from a defendant in England), Greeno realized that the Indian had proved a match for the Inspector on the warpath. He went back to London without recommending an arrest.

Then, more than six weeks later, on November 7, Lance-Corporal Albert Godfrey Gero, Cape Breton Highlanders, was detailed to clean out a stopped-up drain in the washhouse at the Witley camp. The stoppage had been caused by waste paper accumulated around a knife.

The knife was identified as San-

gret's, despite his denial. It was not general issue, but a type unfamiliar to the Canadian Army and easily remembered by witnesses. Sangret had visited that washhouse on October 12, just before Greeno began his interrogation. And the knife had a peculiar hooked tip precisely compatible with the curious wounds observed by Drs. Simpson and Gardner.

Just to confuse the issue, there had, at some point, been another knife—which brings us to the singular episode of Sergeant James Henry Smith, Surrey Constabulary, Dorking.

During the death struggle Joan's handbag and its contents had been widely scattered. After the body had been discovered, the police searched the area thoroughly, and their finds helped to establish the identity of the victim.

Sergeant Smith knew that he was hunting for anything connected with a murdered woman. He found a handbag and tossed it aside. "I thought it was nothing to do with the job." (Fortunately another officer picked it up; it was indeed Joan's.) Near the same spot he found a knife and threw it away. "I did not think it had anything to do with it at all."

Two weeks later he thought to mention this fact to his superiors; a second search found nothing.

The Smith knife was, if one can believe so moronic a witness, "similar to that [the washroom knife] but in worse condition . . . very rusty."

It was undoubtedly the knife that convicted August Sangret. Attempts to establish the presence of bloodstains on his battle dress and blankets were inconclusive. Without the knife the prosecution case amounted to little more than "Well, who else?" (not that this argument is without effect on jurors); and there was plausibility to the defense contention that any passing soldier might have hopefully misinterpreted Joan's amiability (like Private Deadman) and become inflamed to the point of attempting rape. But the knife is hard to get around.

If Sangret killed Joan, why did he do so? The prosecution (under no obligation to prove motive as part of its case) alternatively suggested a jealous rage or a desire to disencumber himself of a pregnant woman insistent upon marriage. The former seems better suited to the nature of the crime.

A third possibility would seem to be the realization that "his" unborn child was actually that of Francis or even of some previous soldier. Or possibly a quarrel arising from the discovery that she was not pregnant at all. (She had missed her period in July and August; the September period would have been due the weekend of her death.)

But murderers have no more need than prosecutors for a precisely defined motive. Life and intimacy and tensions . . .

In Leipzig, in 1821, a soldier-barber named Johann Christian Woyzeck was tried for murder; and upon his crime Georg Büchner (1813–1837) based the superb psychological drama *Woyzeck*—a work almost a century ahead of its time. From this play Alban Berg (1885–1935) adapted his atonal opera *Wozzeck* (1925), one of the most significant and influential works for the modern musical stage.

Play and opera tell the story of an ignorant and confused soldier who loves a girl named Marie and gets her pregnant. Marie is a girl of simple charm, with moments of remorse and depression and longing for death, but generally happy, whether reading her Bible or flirting with passing soldiers. The jealous Woyzeck stabs her, and later drowns himself accidentally in a frantic search for the weapon because "that knife will betray me."

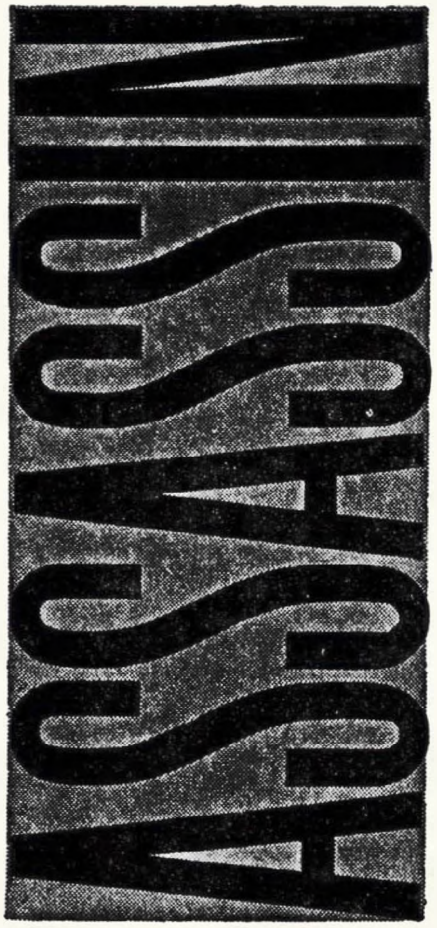
Both works express infinite compassion for tormented people in an incomprehensible world.

The real-life Woyzeck was unquestionably paranoid (though sentenced to death). August Sangret was unarguably sane. The fair trial lasted from February 4 to March 2, 1943; and on March 2, after two hours of deliberation, the jury brought in the verdict: "Guilty, but with a strong recommendation to mercy."

Previous commentators have expressed surprise at that rider.

Sangret appealed the verdict, apparently on his own. Defense counsel (Linton Thorp, K.C.) flatly told the Court of Criminal Appeal that he could see no ground on which the verdict could be disturbed. The Court agreed: no point of law arose, and the adequacy of the evidence was within the exclusive province of the trial jury.

Higher authorities ignored the jury's strong recommendation. On April 29, 1943, August Sangret was hanged at Wandsworth Gaol and his body turned over to Dr. Keith Simpson (and Molly Lefebure) for the post mortem.



FLETCHER FLORA

IT WAS ALL THE GIRL HAD TO LIVE FOR NOW—SOMEBODY ELSE'S DEATH.

Crossing the hotel lobby, Arley Sears descended two steps and pushed his way through a silent swinging door into the cool shadows of a cocktail lounge. He stood quietly for a moment while his eyes dilated in adjustment to the shadows, and then he saw Laurel sitting alone at a tiny table, designed for five-o'clock intimacy, beyond half-a-dozen other tables that were now unclaimed. She was wearing a black linen sheath that had drawn, in the way of sheaths, above her nylon knees, and her pale hair was a light in the ersatz dusk. He felt, seeing her, the familiar resurgence of lust and love and pity and pain that he always felt when seeing her anywhere at any time, or even when, not seeing her, he remembered the last time and waited for the next.

Making his way among the tables, he sat down across from her, the tiny table between them and their knees touching beneath. Her right hand lay beside her stemmed glass, palm down, and he dropped his own beside it in the opposite position. The hands lay at rest for seconds side by side, and then hers crept into

his and was at rest again. The bartender, the only other person in the room, arrived and waited. Arley, suddenly aware of him, glanced up and down again, looking at the glass, half filled with amber, beside the clasped hands.

"What are you having?" he said. "A daiquiri?"

"Yes," she said, "a daiquiri."

"It looks good," he said. "I think I'll have the same."

"A daiquiri is good on a hot day," the bartender said.

He went back to the bar to make it, and Arley and Laurel sat silent, hands clasped, until he had returned and gone again. Laurel's hand lay in his as still as a white stone, but Arley could sense, as he always could, the intensity of her excitement. He could measure it by the slow cadence of her controlled breathing and the brightness of her eyes and the barely perceptible rigidity of her thin face. It was more than excitement, really. Much more. It was a fever and a sickness, and it made him sick to see it. Perhaps she was not quite sane. Whatever you called it, sickness or insanity or dedication, she would never be well, the fever slaked, until he had done for her, after all these years, what he would surely do within the next half-hour.

An eye for an eye, he thought. *A tooth for a tooth.*

He rarely thought in biblical terms, and it disturbed him that he did so now. He did not wish to think in terms of retribution or primitive justice. He wished to think only in terms of what he must do for Laurel's sake—and for his own, as a corollary, because he could never recover her if he did not.

"Have you been outside?" he said.

"No."

"The streets and the square are packed."

"I know. I watched from the window of the room."

"Did you leave your key at the desk?"

"Yes. My door is unlocked."

"Good. The clerk will remember that you were out of your room all the while, and the bartender will remember your being here."

"At most, they'll be able to estimate only the general direction of the shot. It may not come to what the clerk or the bartender will think or say."

"Probably not, but it's just as well to anticipate things."

"Darling, I'll kill myself if it goes wrong for you. I swear I will."

"Don't think about that. It will go well."

"You must be careful that no one sees you when you go up."

"It's not likely. Everyone's attention will be focused on the square within the next ten minutes. There should be no difficulty in slipping up the stairs. Afterward, I'll simply come down the back way, as you directed, and around to the front entrance on the outside."

"Suppose someone sees you coming down."

"That's a risk. A slight one. I told

you that. Chances are, however, most of the hotel help will be around front in the crowd or up on the roof. It's something we have to count on."

"It seems very dangerous. So much depends on things going just right."

"You wanted it this way. You said you wanted it just when everything was going big for him. All at once, you said, with a big crowd cheering."

"Yes. That's what I want." The fever was raging now in her bright, bright eyes. "And later, darling, we'll go away, you and I, and I'll be so good to you, and always so grateful, and I'll make you happy and never sorry for what you did. I promise."

"Sure," he said. "Everything will be fine."

She withdrew her hand from his and lifted her glass, touching her lips with the thin edge of crystal. He lifted his own in response, and they drank together to everything being fine, and then they continued to sit in silence drinking the daiquiris slowly. After a while they became conscious of a kind of beating in their ears, the diminished waves of a giant sound a long way off, but it was actually the crowd in the bright, hot streets and square outside the closed and air-conditioned hotel. The bartender, leaving the bar, walked down the room among the tables and chairs to a window covered by heavy maroon drapes. He pulled the drapes back a few inches on one side and stood there with his back to the room, looking out across the street to the square beyond.

"He's arrived," Arley said. "You can hear the crowd now."

"Yes," she said. "He'll begin speaking in a few minutes."

"I'd better go up."

"You remember the room number?"

"Yes."

"You remember what to do and where to go afterward?"

"I remember."

"Good luck, darling."

"Good is our kind. We won't change it now."

"Hurry back, darling. I'll be waiting here."

He stood and turned and walked away without looking back, ascending the pair of steps into the lobby and crossing to the stairs beyond the elevator. The clerk and two other men were standing at the front entrance, staring out through the glass of the double door. They did not hear him or turn to see him as he went up the stairs to the first landing and passed out of view.

He climbed to the third floor, next to the top, and turned right from the stairs and walked down the hall, parallel to the street, to the last room on the street side. The hall made a right-angle turn to the left there, running the length of a wing to the rear of the building, where there was a narrow green door that opened, he knew, upon narrow stairs descending to an alley exit. He paused outside the room, Laurel's room, looking down the empty hall to the green door, and then he took a pair of thin cotton gloves from a

pocket and put them on and opened the door to the room and entered. Inside, he abandoned the casual attitude he had sustained so far and began to move swiftly, with economy of motion and deadly purpose.

From a closet, where Laurel had left it, he took a rifle, already assembled. He checked to make certain it was loaded, and it was. Smokeless cartridge. There was a telescopic sight attached, but at this distance he would not need it. He had been firing rifles since he was a boy, and he was an expert marksman.

Moving to a window overlooking the street and the courthouse square across the street, he knelt before it on one knee and raised the sash just enough to allow him to sight through the narrow opening from the kneeling position, the tip of the rifle barrel resting on the sill. The air above the street shimmered with heat, distorting his vision, and he closed his eyes for a moment, retreating briefly into darkness with a sense of vast reprieve. The crowd below was silent now, caught and held by a tall man with a mane of black hair who stood raised above them on an improvised platform on the courthouse lawn. The man's voice, amplified, a strangely harsh and mesmerizing cry, was clearly audible to Arley, kneeling by the window, but the words, whatever they were, did not register and had no meaning. Opening his eyes, coming out again from darkness, Arley squinted through the telescopic sight at a patch of black hair above a close-set ear.

John Corrigan, he thought. *Governor John Corrigan.*

Corrigan, the Boy Wonder. No longer a boy, but still a wonder. In the beginning of his glittering career, just after college, county attorney. Next, state's attorney general. Now governor. And men in places of power were already talking about the big job, the top spot beyond which there was really no place else to go. Four more years, they said. Only four to go to that big, big job.

Well, it hadn't been easy, but Corrigan had made it look easy. A brilliant mind, no denying that. No compassion whatever, and an absolute genius for swift and ruthless action. No heart, no conscience, no costly susceptibility to remorse. Only, all in all, a cold and clear and deadly dedication to getting where Corrigan wanted to go.

He had ruined more than one man on the way. Probably he had forgotten most of them. Probably he had even forgotten the minor judge, unfortunately in his way in the early days, who had been destroyed utterly. By contrived evidence. By innuendo. By brutal and open accusations based on the merest of possibilities. But never mind that. The judge had given it credence by putting a bullet into his own brain, and if Corrigan had not forgotten him entirely, he at least remembered him rarely. And he had almost certainly forgotten the seventeen-year-old girl who had stood in black, like a widow, by her father's open grave, her face frozen and still, her eyes already acquiring

that bright, bright light of dedicated hatred. But Arley hadn't forgotten her. He had loved her then, and he loved her now, and she was waiting for him this instant in the cool, dark lounge below. He could not remember when he had consciously begun to share the burden of her mission. Perhaps from the beginning. Perhaps, seeing her in black beside the open grave, he had known at once what he would one day do. . . .

The harsh voice rising from the courthouse square reached a climax of emphasis, almost a scream, and the speaker stood fixed in dramatic pose, an arm raised high, the fist clenched. The crowd roared and screamed in response, sustaining a kind of frenzy. Someone down by the platform began to beat wildly on a bass drum, and someone else, somewhere on the square, began to set off a series of giant firecrackers.

Now, Arley thought. *Now!*

He did not wait, after squeezing the trigger, to see the man below, still fixed in his cataleptic pose, shudder and sag and crumple with a kind of deliberate and final quality of drama into a heap of wilted summer suit. Dropping below the level of the sill, he reached up in the same motion and drew the window shut. Rolling over twice, he stood up and went out into the hall, making certain that the door locked behind him. By the time the crowd in the streets and the square had recovered from stunned immobility he was halfway down the hall to the narrow green door.

Where the stairs came out on the floor below, as Laurel had told him, there was an unlocked closet in which cleaning supplies were kept. He left the rifle and the cotton gloves in the closet, a matter of two seconds, and went on down the stairs and out into a narrow alley paved with brick. They would find the rifle, of course, but no matter. He had acquired it long ago in a way that would make it impossible to trace it to him. He had kept it, he supposed, although never admitting it even to himself, for this particular day.

The streets and the square were a mass of milling men and women. Hardly anyone, except those near the platform, had as yet learned exactly what had happened. Working his way toward the hotel entrance, hugging the front of the building, Arley turned into the lobby past the clerk at the door, who said something to him in a voice thin with near hysteria, and went on, without answering, across the lobby and down the two steps into the dusk of the lounge.

Laurel was waiting quietly where he had left her, and she had not, apparently, moved in the slightest. She must have moved actually, however, for her glass, which had been empty, was now half full. She stared at him without speaking, and he could hear her measured breathing.

"All right," he said softly.

"Dead?"

"Yes. Dead."

"Are you sure?"

"He was standing perfectly still.

I had a perfect aim. I'm positive."

She looked down into her glass, cupped in her hands, down, down past the olive in amber depths to the black pit of her father's grave. When she looked up again her eyes were dull, the bright light gone, cinders left by the fire of fever that was also gone.

"I don't seem to feel anything," she said.

"Maybe later," he said.

But he knew that she would not. Now at the end of her long dedication she had achieved, instead of peace, an arid emptiness that he would share and never fill. After her bright, intense obsession, the long design of a special death, there would be nothing left for which to live, certainly not for him, and he understood with silent and assured despair that he had killed *two* people from the window upstairs.

"Darling," she said, "thank you so much."

"You're welcome," he said.

He wanted a drink, and he wished the bartender would come back from wherever he'd gone.

PRATHER

FILM STRIP

RICHARD S. PRATHER

We'd come to the beach to relax, the blonde and I. So what was with this character throwing guys off cliffs?

FILM STRIP

A SHELL SCOTT NOVELETTE

ROBBIE WAS WEARING A TWO-PIECE pink bikini in extremely brazen fashion, or at least without falsie modesty, and seldom had such astounding curves been so joyously uncensored.

The day was a sparkling Sunday in July, the place was a secluded half-moon beach on California's coast a few miles south of Laguna. It was my first day in a long time away from downtown Los Angeles and my office—*Sheldon Scott, Investigations*—but one day like this could make up for months of smog.

The sun was bright, the air clear, the sand under our bare feet voluptuously warm. The sea was, as always, bluer than I remembered it, and the combers boomed a few yards away, white jets of foam slashing the beach like fangs.

And the girl was Robbie.

Roberta Greta Ducharme. Twenty-four years old, but wiser than twenty-four, and in her blood and bone the best of Mexico, Sweden, and France. Tall enough, with red-burned chestnut hair, sweet lips, gray eyes like warm, solid smoke. And a body —indescribable. I live and work in Hollywood, I've seen a lot of them, but Robbie stood in the sun and left most of the rest in the shade. The measurements were there, splendidly there, but they were statistics that merely whispered; her body did the shouting.

Robbie, at the moment, was very much full of hell.

I was trying out a big Zoomar telescopic lens on my new Bell-and-Howell movie camera, holding on Robbie while she danced and pranced. She posed, flew around, wiggled a little. The word for it was: Sensational.

"Shell," Robbie called to me.

"Yeah?"

"Let me take a picture—I haven't any of you yet."

"Ah, what a tragic—"

"Really. You can give it to me when it's developed, so I'll have proof."

"Proof?"

"Uh-huh. If I tell my girl friends I went out with a devilish private detective six feet two inches tall and a couple hundred and—how many pounds?"

"Five or six. Wearing my trunks."

"With that fabulous tan and crazy white hair sticking up on your head and those white eyebrows—"

"Now, that's enough. I'm not sure you're going at this in the true spirit of—"

"—and all those muscles and all, they wouldn't believe me. But if I have a movie to show them . . ." She frowned, very prettily. "They may still not believe me."

I grabbed her, picked her up, and ran toward the water, but she squealed and wriggled so frantically, yelling, "My hair, my hair! You'll get my hair wet!" that I stopped before she got inundated, turned, and carried her up the beach again. She rested limp in my arms, let her head fall back, thick glossy hair brushing my thigh. She sighed, then said, "Fun, Shell. Very fun."

"True, Robbie. Very fun."

It was. I'd talked to Robbie several times before. She was a model, part-time actress, part-time cocktail waitress. I'd met her during a part-time-cocktail-waitress period and we'd had fun yacking, but this was our first date, first outing together. The beach had been the right choice for sure. We were completely alone here, sea on one side, half circle of cliffs on the other. The only ways in or out were along narrow paths down the cliffs, one at each end of the beach.

I put Robbie on her feet again and she winked at me, tossed her hair, and pranced away like a skittish colt. I got the camera focused on her, took a long shot, and then pushed the little lever that moved the adjustable lens, to bring her up close in the view finder, and *zoom*, right up there! It was wonderful, and got even better. These were shots I would look at when I got old, to get me young again.

"Shell," Robbie called, gyrating around, "I never told you."

"Told me what?"

"Ever since I was a teenager, I've had a suppressed desire to be a strip-tease dancer."

"Aha, so that's what you're doing out there?" I lowered the camera and grinned at her.

I thought something moved against the skyline a couple of hundred yards away, up at the top of the cliffs. I glanced over there but nothing was in sight. A comber hit jagged rocks at the cliff's base and spurted thick feathers of spray high above them. Maybe that was what I'd seen.

Robbie laughed. "I'm just getting loosened up now. But really—I'm serious. Just once, just *once*, I'd love to really do it! It's crazy, I know—"

"No, it's not."

"—but I almost have to *fight* it sometimes."

"Robbie, dear, don't fight it. Don't you know suppression can warp your tender little brain all out of whack? You can get whacky, you can get . . . complexes and all that jazz."

"Some of those girls must have *fun* when they slither out on the stage"—she made a little slithering motion—"and sway and wiggle around"—she made some little swaying and wiggling-around motions—"and then . . . get all wound up . . . and let . . . *go*— Oh, what am I saying? I almost got carried away."

"Don't stop, don't stop. You were just going good there."

She laughed again. "I've seen them on the stage in the lights. The men just whoop and holler, you know it?"

"Yeah, I know it. In fact—"

"And they actually whistle when the girl glides around and then stops and . . . gets all wound up . . . and lets . . . *go*— Oh, there I go again."

"Drat it, you *didn't* go. Robbie, you can't just . . . are you going to leave everything so . . . all half-finished . . . and just dangling like—"

"I tell you what I'll do, Shell."

"Yeah?"

"I'll *do* it. Do a strip-tease, right here, I mean, just like on a stage. And you can make a movie of it—if you promise never to show it to anybody but me."

"I promise!"

"You won't think I'm awful—"

"What a ridiculous—"

"—or a brazen hussy, or bad or anything?"

"No, no—"

"I just feel so free . . ."

"Free . . ."

". . . so good . . ."

". . . good . . ."

She'd been prancing about, but now she stopped and stared at me, head slightly lowered, smiling, white teeth pressed together. "I'll really do it—unless you stop me."

Well, you know it: I sure as hell didn't stop her. Still smiling, she began to dance again. Slowly at first, then a little more wildly.

"Make the movie!" she said, laughing.

I shot a few feet of film as she spun and arched and whirled. I thought something moved again on the edge of that cliff, but just then Robbie stretched both hands behind her back, reaching for the bowknot of the bikini bra. And I forgot to look away. The movement made her breasts seem to swell, burst forward against the cloth as if they were going to thrust completely through it.

She pulled at the strings of the bra and it loosened, started to fall. But she brought one arm forward quickly, pressed her hand against the middle of the cloth, held it there while the outer edges fell, half-baring the white roundness of her breasts.

Well, it began feeling as if my blood were vulcanizing the lining of my veins, as if I were cooking from the inside out. I could actually feel the increased heat of my skin. Because there was something unique about this Robbie, a kind of wild witchcraft or mesmerism, an electrical atmosphere all around her, impalpable and invisible but there just the same.

It was like getting hit with an invisible sap, almost as if, when she stood twenty feet away and I looked at her, there was really no distance between us. As if she moved in some fourth dimension of her own—and that fourth dimension was sex. It wasn't anything conscious or purposeful; it was just there, all the time, and you couldn't ever be completely unaware of it even when she was sitting still. And she was not sitting

still, she was moving, swaying almost lasciviously now, the bra sliding, slipping.

And I guess I slipped, mentally, into some kind of different dimension myself. Because there were men on the brink of the cliff now, two of them clearly outlined against the sky. A tall man and a short one, the shorter man slumped, held almost erect by the other. Part of my mind noted those other movements, registered them all, but none of it penetrated more than a few cells deep into my brain, not at first.

Robbie laughed softly, delightedly, let her arm fall to her side, the pink brassière dangling from her fingers. Sunlight silvered the tops of her full, bare breasts, shimmered on them as they swayed and trembled.

On the cliff, the men awkwardly moved a step or two forward, onto the very edge, seemed to float above the emptiness at their feet.

Robbie spread her legs and leaned back, away from me, shoulders rocking slowly, then faster, faster. The film mechanism stopped. She straightened again. I wound the camera quickly as she twirled the brassière around her head, threw it to the sand. I put the camera to my eye again, let film click past the lens. She stood in one spot for seconds, posing. Body straight, head back, hands gliding slowly up her sides and past her face, brushing her thick, red-brown hair with the backs of her hands and letting it fall, tangled, against her shoulders.

The taller man gave the other a shove. He went over the cliff's edge, fell, turning. Robbie's hands were fumbling at the side of her narrow bikini trunks. The falling man hit a projecting ledge of earth, skidded, went spinning over the side, arms and legs flailing crazily. There was another forty feet of space between him and the rocky beach below.

It was sudden, quick. I knew what was happening, but dimly, vaguely. It was occupying more of my mind. Not quite enough yet.

Robbie said something to me but I didn't understand her bubbling words. The bikini briefs were untied now, held up only by the light touch of her fingers, hands at the curve of her hips. She leaned forward slightly, breasts swaying, slid the bikini briefs down. It seemed to me that she moved very slowly—and that the tumbling man fell very slowly, too. The pink cloth slid downward, her hands brushing the white flare of her hips. Then I heard the thud.

He hit the beach almost two hundred yards away, but I heard the dull, deadly sound clearly. Before, it had been like a silent movie, shadow without substance; but that ugly sound suddenly made it real. I jerked my head. The other man was scrambling down the path.

From the corner of my eye I saw Robbie bend forward, raise one leg, reach and grab something pink before she straightened up. Only now the impressions were reversed. Robbie was on the periphery, and in the center of my consciousness was—murder.

It sent a chill over my skin. I glanced at Robbie. One vivid glimpse of her standing a few feet away in sun-limned nakedness, splash of pinkness in one hand, standing straight, back slightly arched. Just a glimpse of her, half a second—and then I was running. That taller man was still scrambling down the path. He'd probably thrown the other man over the cliff alive but unconscious, and was going down to make sure he was dead.

When I was halfway to the body, the man saw me. He froze on the steeply slanting path, jerked his head toward me. Then he turned, started back up in a hurry, feet sliding. There wasn't a chance I could catch him. He'd be gone in seconds—and I didn't have any idea who he was, what he looked like.

The camera was still in my hand; I'd forgotten it, been unaware of it while running. I slid to a stop, raised the camera, and centered it on the man, shoved the Zoomar lever forward as I started the film unwinding. His body grew larger in the view finder. I shouted as loudly as I could, and he turned. He stared—and I had him.

Then I lowered the camera, ran forward again. Twenty yards away now lay the sprawled body. As my eyes fell on it, there was a sudden sharp sound. A spurt of sand leaped close on my left. That sound I knew well—a gunshot.

I dug one foot into the sand, skidded, slowed, and then jumped forward, jerking my head up. He was below the top of the cliff, facing me, right arm extended. The gun cracked again, but the bullet hit yards from me. All I could think of for a moment was that if I got a film of him shooting at me his goose would be cooked to a crisp. It didn't occur to me that I might get a film of the ape killing me; that the .38 Colt Special I usually carry was now two hundred yards down the beach; that I was standing out here in bright sunlight shooting a camera at a guy who was shooting a real gun at me. I just swung the camera up, held it on him for two or three seconds, getting a stupendous shot—through the telescopic lens I could even see the faint flash of fire from the gun's muzzle. It was an astounding, a remarkable shot, a real murderer, real bullets. . . .

That was the one that filtered. That brought me to my few senses. Real . . . bullets?

I let out a great blast of sound and jumped six feet through the air. That gun cracked again. I felt the impact, the sudden shock. It jarred me, turned me. The camera flew from my hands. I slammed down on one knee. I rolled, got to my feet again, squatting low, looked up. The man was scrambling upward again and as I watched he went over the cliff's edge and out of sight.

Slowly I straightened up, heart pounding. I looked down over my bare skin, felt over my back and swim trunks. No blood. No holes. Then I saw the Bell-and-Howell on the sand. He hadn't hit me; he'd hit

the camera. It was twisted, case sprung open, and film half out of the sprockets, sunlight glaring on it all.

I clambered up the face of the cliff, but he was long gone. A haze of dust hung over the dirt road leading to Coast Boulevard a quarter of a mile away. From the cliff's edge I looked down the beach. The sun was getting low, and the hellish glare that at certain hours bounces from the sea almost blinded me. I couldn't see Robbie unless I squinted and looked carefully—which explained why the guy hadn't seen us down there.

On the beach again, I picked up the camera, forced the gate closed over the ruined film, walked to the body on the beach. The man was quite dead. But he was still warm, limp, not dead long. Almost surely he'd been alive when pushed over the cliff's edge. It would probably have passed as an accidental death, instead of the murder it was. He was a short man, maybe a hundred and fifty pounds, bald, his skull caved in above his left eye. His face was deeply pimpled where it had hit the sand.

I left him, walked back down the beach.

Robbie was in her bikini again, still a gorgeous sight, but somehow not quite the same now. The difference between my one brief but marvelously vivid glimpse of Robbie unadorned, unashamed, compared to Robbie adorned—even in a brief pink bikini—was the difference between prime ribs and hamburger, between wine and sour grapes. And in me started growing a cold, concentrated, surging desire to get my hands on that slob who'd just gotten away and slowly pull off his head.

As I stopped near her, Robbie said, with a chill as of early winter in her voice: "You can take me home now, Scott."

Scott. Not Shell any more. That probably meant she wanted to hit me over the skull with something large and heavy. What was the matter with her? Didn't she realize I'd had no choice?

I said: "Simmer down. Didn't you hear those shots?"

"Shots? Is that what they were? I heard some noises." She tossed her head. "All I know is, there I was all . . . well . . . and off you went. Actually *running*. Running *away*."

Nobody will deny that women have a different approach to logic than do men. They sort of sneak up on it from behind, like an Indian skulking through the grass. But this was too much.

"Robbie, my dear little imbecile," I said with some heat, "I have just been eyeballing a most unpleasant corpse, not to mention the fact that I just got shot at several dozen times —three or four times, anyway—and the stupendous damned movie I took of the killer is all shot to hell—get it through your head a guy has just been murdered."

"I'll murder you."

"I'm serious!"

"I'm not?"

"Robbie. You really don't under-

stand!" I took a deep breath. "Dear. Robbie. I am aware of what's eating you. I realize it is not considered cricket in your dizzy set—in which at the moment I include all women —for a man to race wildly over the sand immediately after—"

"What do I care? I really couldn't care less. I really couldn't. Take me home."

I grabbed her shoulders, looked into her face. "I have a surprise for you. There is a dead guy lying down the beach a ways. His head is all crashed in, and most unbeautiful. That's why I went tripping away, dear heart. I saw a tall cat fling him off the cliff."

Apparently she hadn't seen anything except me whooping along the tidemarks, running like a coward. Coward—little did she know.

"Of course," she said. "There's a massacre. Custer is down there—"

I grabbed her hand and yanked her after me. In arguments with women there comes a time when words are useless and positive action is indicated. I hauled her after me, her feet dragging and kicking, and she rattled a great deal of popcorn-popping Spanish at me, a language she used when at a temperature which would split clinical thermometers. She didn't even see the dead man until we were almost on top of him.

Then I stopped, turned her around, and pointed. "There, lamebrain. I was telling you the complete truth. I *did* see a guy fling him off—"

I won that argument. She fainted.

2.

Night fell softly as we drove back toward Los Angeles. The police had been notified, the body trundled away, and Robbie and I had that behind us now, the evening ahead.

She had forgiven me. Not all at once, but unreservedly at last. Now she was snuggled close to me on the seat, hanging onto my arm. The top was down on my Cadillac, and a spiced breeze washed around us.

We had been discussing the afternoon, and now she asked me a question she hadn't asked before. "Shell, the man who pushed the other one off the cliff. What did he look like?"

"Why, he was . . . I don't know. I was so busy trying to get the film of him, and then dodging bullets, I never did really get a look at him." I considered the sad fact. "I haven't the faintest idea what he looks like. And I don't have the film now, either."

"How will they catch him?"

"Part of it could depend on how soon they identify the body. There were no papers on him, no clue yet to who he was. Once they figure out who had a motive to kill him, the field might narrow down. Right now it's wide open."

"Maybe he'll even get away with it."

I snarled silently, glaring ahead. "Not if I . . . have anything . . . to say about it." I was remembering what he had interrupted back there on the beach. Of all times for an ape to start sailing bodies around. And

that slug in my camera had not only ruined the shots of him, but of Robbie. "I will . . . tear him . . . limb from limb," I growled. "I will beat one half of him to death . . . with the other half of him."

She purred softly, snuggled closer, and hugged my arm.

I discovered I was halfway into the left lane, driving along with a sappy smile on my face. I pulled over where I belonged. Once again I had been remembering Robbie standing on the beach, blue sea behind her—just before that other body went flying through the air. I'd gotten *one* look, but only one, and oh, so brief, of her standing there, pink pants in her hand. Maybe in the space of a few seconds then I had been subjected to so many sensational sensations and brain-twisting sights that it had blown a neuronic fuse in my nervous system—but something new had indeed been added.

Robbie was—and for that one super-stimulating half-second there on the sun-warmed beach had been —so absolutely stunning that now it was as though a small perfect replica of her had been heated to a white-hot sizzle and used to brand my brain. It stayed up there, about the fourth convolution over, glowing and letting off pretty sparks. It was a new experience in many ways. I could merely close my eyes and see us up there, sparking. Or, rather, see *her* up there. I shook my head, trying to organize my striking thoughts. But they remained disorganized.

Robbie didn't speak again until we were on North Rossmore in Hollywood, almost to the Spartan Apartment Hotel, where I live. And where we were going. Then she said: "I was just thinking about that man, Shell. You don't know what *he* looks like. But I wonder if he got a good look at *you*?"

I hadn't carefully considered that angle. I pulled over to the curb, parked across the street from the Spartan. "That's a good question," I said.

I took the keys from the ignition, opened the car door, and stepped into the dimly-lighted street. "A disturbing question, Robbie. Unfortunately, I don't have the answer."

I started around to open the door on her side—and *blam-blam*, two quick shots, one after the other. The first one got me. It spun me to my left, banged me against the car, knocked me off balance. I fell awkwardly, turning, thudded down on my right shoulder, and rolled onto my back.

I came up again fast, yanking the .38 from under my coat, bent forward in a crouch. I didn't even know where the shots had come from. But then I heard the slap of fast-pounding feet, a short silence, then the roar of a car's engine, the scrape of tires sliding on asphalt.

I jumped toward the Cad, then remembered I'd had the keys in my hand. I'd dropped them, they were somewhere here in the street. I found them, but by then the guy was at least a mile away.

I swore softly, then felt over my chest and arm, near where that slug had smacked me. I didn't know how badly I'd been hit; you seldom do for a while. But then I found the spot. The bullet had passed between my holstered gun and side, gouging out a cubic inch or two of skin and flesh. Nothing serious. My holster had taken most of the blow; that had really been what spun me around. My gun seemed all right, but the holster was ruined. Fine; that was better than me being ruined.

Robbie's head appeared in the window on my side.

"She-ell," she said shakily.

"It's okay, honey. Everything's all right. Except that sonofa—he got away." I paused, hauled in a couple of deep breaths. "Incidentally, Robbie. That question you just asked me. Now I can answer it."

"What . . . what'll we do?"

"We'll go up to my apartment, and have a tall, cool, potent drink."

We did. I unlocked the door of my apartment, pointed out the tanks of tropical fish for Robbie, ignored Amelia—Robbie would inevitably lamp that yard-square nude painting I found in a pawnshop, and cherish—and showed her where the booze and ice were in the kitchenette.

"Fix us something exciting," I said, then went into the bathroom, peeled off my coat and shirt.

The slug had chewed me up a bit, and the wound was beginning to feel unpleasant, but it wasn't bad. Just bloody. There was quite a lot of blood.

I dunked a washrag in warm water, and right then Robbie said from behind me: "Try this."

I turned around. She had two tall glasses in her hands. Then her eyes dropped to the side of my chest and her mouth stretched wide as if she were going to scream, though no sound came out.

Finally she said: "You're bleeding! Shell, you're bleeding!"

"Don't get excited. It's nothing to—"

"But you're shot! You're in pain!"

"It's . . . only a little shooting pain."

"I'll call an ambulance."

"Robbie, dammit. I've got healed *scars* on me more dangerous than this. Really, relax." Her face was pale and she looked weak. I said, "Robbie, we'll get it all fixed. But it isn't bad—it's just all the blood." I grinned. "My blood, you see, is so red—"

"Are you really all right?"

"Yes. I'm just so red-blooded—"

"Come in and sit down."

She wouldn't let me get the conversation headed in the right direction at all. I mopped some of the blood off, clamped a towel under my arm, and went into the front room with her. She insisted we call a doctor—which I had fully intended to do anyway—so after phoning the police I called the room two doors from my own, where Dr. Paul Anson lives. Paul is a good M.D., with a very sharp eye for the ladies, and is also a very good friend of mine. He said he'd be over in a minute.

When he knocked I yelled for him to come on in and he stepped inside, pushed the door shut with his medical bag. Then he walked toward the chocolate-brown divan on which Robbie and I were sitting, and he did not see me at all. His eyes landed on Robbie and opened wide, then went back to normal, except that they had a sly little squint to them, which squint I had seen before.

Very tall, ruggedly good-looking, fired with purpose, he strode straight across the room to Robbie and said in his best bedside manner, "Well, what seems to be wrong with us, my dear?"

"*I*," I said, "am what's wrong with us."

He looked at me and grinned. "Ah, well. What is it this time? Shot again, hit on the head, busted eardrum—"

"Your tender solicitude gags me, Doctor. Dedicated Paul Anson, swooning on the altar of humanity. 'I swear on the holy scalpel of Hopocraxopy—' "

"Hippocrates?"

"You know what I mean. I'm shot. I'm bleeding to death. I feel faint, I'm getting dippy!"

"You sure are. Let's take a look." He examined the sliced area of my chest and side, going "Hmm," and "Ahh," and then said: "I think a large Band-Aid will do it. But I'll give you an expensive shot."

He expertly cleaned and bandaged what he referred to as my mortal wound, stuck a needle into me, keeping up a running fire of sophisticated chatter and worldly commentary—looking at Robbie all the time; he didn't say another word to me—then had a drink with us. Just before he left—I had to tell him to get the hell out, of course—he tugged his eyes from Robbie, leaned close to my ear, and said: "You rotter, you despoiler—wait till you get my bill."

"I know. Two appendectomies, a tonsillitis—"

"Tonsillectomy, you ignorant—"

"—removal of spleen and gizzard, go."

He went. With one last leer at Robbie.

As the door closed behind him she said: "He's nice, isn't he?"

"Is he? I hadn't noticed—"

"But he's so witty, and knows so much about the world and all—"

"Nuts, he makes half of it up. Sheer fabrication. It just sounds good in that oily voice of his. Hah, witty, knows so much—"

"Why, Shell, you actually sound jealous."

"Jealous? Me? Why, I never heard such a—"

She laughed. "Are you all right?"

"Yeah, now that he's gone, I'm all right. What do you mean, witty? He didn't say anything even intelligent—"

"Shell, lean over here and rest a little."

She indicated, with a gentle pat of her hand, where I was to lean. I stopped arguing. I leaned. Resting dandily, I said: "Robbie, I have a splendid idea. You must stay here

while I recuperate. It may take days, of course, but—"

"The doctor's right down the hall. What could I do?"

"Well, you could . . . What good is a doctor? You can be my nurse, dear. And nurse me back to health."

"What exactly does that mean?"

"Why, you could undress my wounds—*dress* them, I mean, and cool my fevered brow, fever my—"

"You be quiet. Now I'm *sure* you're all right. And I have to go."

"Go?" I said. *"Go?"*

"Yes. I can't stay here."

"Who says?"

"I says. Really. Oh, Shell, sit down. Don't stand out there waving your arms. You'll spring open and bleed to death."

"It wouldn't happen. Even if it did, I have blood to spare, red blood, wild blood, it sings in my veins and yodels in my arteries, savage blood —listen to the drums! Don't you hear it? Can't you *feel* it? I—"

"Shell, stop waving your arms around. And sit down here and rest." She patted again. "Or don't you want to rest?"

"It isn't exactly what I had in mind. Listen, you don't know all there is to know about my blood yet—"

"I know more than I realized was possible. And if you want the truth, I believe you. But I really do have to go."

"Go?" I said. *"Go?"*

"Yes. In about . . . five minutes. But I'll go right now if you don't sit down and behave yourself."

"Well, okay. I'll sit down."

She meant what she'd said. After five minutes of resting she got up and said, "Will I see you tomorrow?"

"Yep. Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow—"

"I'll call a cab."

"The devil you say. I'll drive you home."

"No, I wouldn't think of it."

"I will drive you home."

I won that argument, too. The first one since she'd fainted.

Later, alone and relaxing in bed before going to sleep, I thought about what had happened today. The police didn't yet know who the dead man was, much less the identity of his killer: the killer, therefore, might be roaming around free for days or even weeks. He, on the other hand, obviously knew who I was, realized I'd made a movie of him which could be his ticket to the gas chamber, and probably believed I knew what he looked like. Clearly he did *not* know his last shot at me had ruined the films.

So he would be roaming around trying to get those films—and kill me.

Maybe I ought to take a full-page ad in the local papers, I thought, addressed to the killer: "You shot a hole in my camera before you shot a hole in me. The films are kaput. Stop worrying!" And sign it Shell Scott. But he probably wouldn't believe me. The fool would probably just go on trying to murder me.

Then another link formed in my

chain of thought. Maybe I should take that ad, after all, and phrase it differently. Something like: "Sensational films of murderer! Shell Scott shoots killer, killer shoots Shell Scott! Stupendous film sequence, blazing guns, murderer fleeing! Have You Seen This Man? See colossal preview this afternoon at the Colossal Theater. . . ."

I grinned in the darkness. It might work. Still thinking about it, I fell asleep.

3.

It was 10:00 A.M. Tuesday morning. I was driving down Hollywood Boulevard toward the Chasen Theater, off Hollywood on Van Ness Avenue. The thing was set. I knew Jim Chasen, owner of the theater, which was why I'd chosen his movie house. With his cooperation I had run my advertisements in several newspapers yesterday and today. As long as the killer believed his chops were really going to be on the big screen, he would almost certainly try to grab the films. Since we had no way of recognizing the man among the other customers, and therefore couldn't keep him from getting inside with the crowd, we'd have to wait until he made his move. Jim figured, and so did I, that the action would take place in the projection room, where the killer would naturally expect the films to be.

The Chasen wouldn't open for business until 1:30 P.M., the bill to start at two, but I wanted to be staked out inside well before then. The "Fleeing Murderer . . . Guns Blazing!" added attraction was scheduled for 3:45 P.M., at the break between two halves of a double feature. We figured our man would make his move sometime during the first half of the twin bill. It all seemed logical.

Robbie, however, had not been logical. I hadn't told her of my plan, but she'd seen the ad and called me, raising hell. If I was going to the theater, she wanted to go along; I'd do something crazy and get killed if she didn't keep an eye on me; a lot of other people would be there, one more wouldn't hurt. I told her no. We argued. I told her no. Firmly. And that settled that.

I parked a block from the Chasen, walked to the alley entrance behind it. Jim Chasen let me in.

"All quiet?" I said.

"Yeah. Glad you're here, though. I'll be in the projection booth, you know."

"So will I. He'll have to shoot me before he can shoot you, Jim." I grinned. "He may not even show up. If he does, there probably won't be any trouble."

He laughed sourly. "You make it sound like fun. Want some coffee?"

"Sounds good."

We walked through the empty theater. Soft music was playing; as we went into the projection booth I commented on it and Jim said: "I always pipe the records in while I'm setting up. Sort of creepy otherwise. Good for the customers, too, when

they come in. Gets them in a pleasant mood while they wait for the show."

He poured hot black coffee. I raised the steaming brew toward my mouth, then froze, cup halfway to my lips. "Jim," I said, "I'm an idiot."

"Huh? What's the matter?"

"We've been figuring the guy would walk in unobserved with the other customers. We'd have to let him come in, because we don't know what he looks like. But *he* doesn't know that. He undoubtedly thinks we've got him made, even have a moving picture of him—that's the whole idea of this setup. We've been looking at this from *our* point of view, instead of his."

"Sure, I . . . Oh."

"Yeah. If he thinks we know his face, he's not likely to show it on the way in." I swore. "More likely he'd try to sneak in here *before* the rest of the customers. Maybe . . . about now."

Jim tried not to show that he was worried. He just spilled his coffee. "You don't think—"

"Did you look the place over yet? Johns, closets, backstage?"

"No." He swallowed. "I thought . . . you said . . ."

"Yeah. I know what I said." I stood up. "Maybe it'll work out that way, too. But I'll take a look around, anyway." I paused. "Just in case . . . maybe you'd better wait out front until I give you the all-clear. If he should be here—"

"You're right!" He didn't let me finish. "If something happens—ah—I can call a cop. That seems like a good idea, anyway. Call several cops."

"Yeah. They won't be overjoyed by my little plan, but that seems the least of our worries at the moment."

He said there were two rest rooms off the lobby, another small one, for employees, down at the left-front corner of the theater, and told me where closets and a storeroom were. We left the projection booth and went into the empty lobby. As I took my Colt from its new clamshell holster, Jim scooted with unseemly haste out through the lobby doors. I checked both rest rooms. They were empty. I walked back past the projection booth, down the carpeted aisle. When I was a few feet from the rear entrance through which Jim had admitted me earlier, I heard the door rattle softly. The knob moved slightly; it couldn't be turned from the outside, but could be opened from inside.

I stepped quickly to the door, held my gun ready, turned the knob, and yanked. As the door flew open I stepped forward, brought up my gun, and jabbed it into a soft white breast. I knew it was soft; I knew it was white; it was Robbie's.

For a moment my nerves sputtered, and I sputtered, and then I grabbed Robbie's arm and yanked her inside, pushed the door shut. "You little fool," I said. "What do you think—"

"Don't be angry—"

"Don't be *angry?* Don't be—"

"I just wanted to be here. I was in at the start, and I want to be in at the finish."

"It'll be your finish, if you don't—"

"Anyway, I told you I was coming."

"And I told you you weren't."

"Poof."

I groaned, turned around, and slapped a hand on my head. Then I got a grip on myself. "Robbie, please listen. The guy may be here right now. Or he may show up any second."

"But you said—"

"I know what the hell I said." I paused, thinking. "Did anybody see you come down the alley? Or come inside?"

"No. Nobody was out there. Only a fellow sweeping."

"Sweeping? Sweeping the *alley?*"

"No, silly. Just in back of his shop. I suppose it was his shop. They sell things made out of driftwood—"

"Maybe it was his shop. I'll brace that guy and make sure before you go back out there. You'd better wait in the projection booth . . . No. That's the place he'll head for. Just stand still a minute."

I eased the door open, looked up and down the alley. Nothing. Nobody was in sight. Probably Robbie was right, just a guy sweeping out his shop. But I couldn't be sure—and if he'd seen her come in . . .

I turned to Robbie. "Of all the—"

"Don't swear at me."

"Well, if this isn't a—"

"I thought you'd be glad."

"You what?"

"I thought you'd be glad. That I wanted to be with you, in the heat of battle, in the thick of—"

"Never mind. Boy, here we stand yakking like a couple of psychos while that guy may be drawing a bead on my fat head, squeezing—look, you stand right here while I look around . . . no, I can't leave you alone. Come with me. No—"

"Make up your mind."

"I will make up my mind to sock you if you don't shut up. Come along while I check this joint. But stay behind me. I'm thick enough to stop at least a couple of bullets. And I probably will now. Oh, brother, one of these days—"

"I thought you'd be glad."

I quit. "Come on," I said.

We gave the backstage area a good going over. It was a little spooky back there, with the ropes and electrical cables, speakers and back side of the big screen, and the gloomy corners. But the area was empty of people. I figured I'd checked everything except the employees' john that Jim had mentioned. It was reached through a short hallway behind curtains at stage left, under a softly glowing "Exit" sign. I went down the little hallway, Robbie silent behind me, reached the door of the small rest room.

I was thinking that after I had checked this spot, and looked around in the alley for the egg who'd been sweeping, I could send Robbie on

her way. I was thinking that the guy I was after might be clear across the Mexican border by now. I was thinking once in a while of Robbie, and the fact that although she'd complicated things a bit, it was pleasant in a way that she'd wanted to be with me, and even thinking—briefly—of other facets of Robbie.

I was thinking of entirely too many things.

4.

I pushed open the door and didn't see anybody, and stuck my head inside for a better look, and from behind the door on my left he jammed the gun so hard against my temple that it knocked my head six inches sideways.

The .38 was in my right hand. I started to slap it forward. Six inches from my ear the *click-click* of the hammer going back on a revolver. And two words: "Go ahead."

I heard the soft intake of breath outside, a few feet away. Robbie. For a moment she was all I could think of. I wondered if the guy had heard her soft, sudden breath. I hadn't even seen the man yet.

There were faint whispering movements behind me. Robbie. Moving, no telling where. I started talking, not worrying about what I said, just stringing words together to cover the sounds Robbie was making.

"You're stuck, friend. You can't get out of here—the place is lousy with law. You don't think I'd come here alone, do you?" My head was throbbing; he'd really banged me with the gun.

He spoke again, his voice flat. "I figured it for a setup. But I also figured you'd expect me today, pal. That's why I came in last night. I'll get out, Scott."

"You know my name, huh?"

"Sure. And you know me. Drop the heater."

I dropped it, slowly turned my head. As I did, he stepped back, kept the gun in his hand out of my reach. But it looked me in the eye.

I did know the guy. Only by reputation, mugg shots. And I'd seen him a time or two in bars where heavy men hang out. His name was Billings, or something like that, but he was called Spade because another gambler had caught him with an extra ace—the ace of spades—in a poker game and shot him. Unfortunately it hadn't killed him. He was a safecracker, a professional thief.

He was about my height, thin, with a dark angular face and a nose sharp enough to slice cheese. His eyes were red-rimmed, lips drooping. I said, "You were right. It is a setup. And you walked into it."

"I'll walk out, too. Pal, we're going to get them films—only I'm not going to try getting away with them. I'll ruin them right here, see? When they're gone, there's nothing left but your word—and I can beat that if it ever comes to court. That's if I'm stopped. But I figure to make it out, pal."

"Not if I can help it."

He grinned unpleasantly. "You

won't be able to help it. And if there's no films, and no Scott, nobody's going to tag me with any murder rap. Not in a hundred years."

He didn't know how right he was. Even I hadn't known until now that it was Spade we wanted. He'd actually be in the clear—if he got out. I said: "There's just one thing wrong, Spade. You got in all right. But the only way you'll get out now is on a stretcher."

"You're just as dumb as all the cops I ever met. I told you I figured this for a trap. So I don't plan to be seen going out." He stepped back against the wall. "Take a look, pal."

I moved forward a little as he gestured with his gun. "Maybe I'm not so dumb, Scott."

Maybe he wasn't. I started to get it when I saw the hole. In the wall of the rest room was a jagged hole about two feet in diameter. The wall of this rest room was also the outer wall of the Chasen Theater. But I didn't know what was on the other side of the wall.

Spade told me, bragging a little. "Next door's a shoe store, Scott. I had a friend get me the architect's plans of this dump, plus the joints on both sides. The shoe store was perfect." He gestured at the hole. "Through there's a storeroom, back end of the shoe store. The old duck that runs it's in there now, tied up and gagged." He grinned. "Took me most of the night to get through. Just about like the Western-Federal job."

That rang a bell. Six months or so back the Western-Federal Savings and Loan had been burglarized. The thieves had broken through the wall between it and the adjoining clothing store, blown the safe, and left before dawn with $80,000. Leaving, they'd been spotted by a police car and chased, but they'd gotten away after several shots had been fired. A police officer in the car had been hit, and died the next day.

This guy just might make it, I thought. Through the hole, out the shoe store, and home free.

"Okay, Scott, let's get the films. In case anything goes wrong, you get a pill in the head." He paused. "And don't try to get close to me. I've been awake all night. I'm tired. I'm sleepy and damned hungry. What I mean, I'm on edge."

I didn't say anything. We went out, down the short hallway into the empty theater. If I told Spade there weren't any films, he wouldn't believe me; and no matter what I said, he'd check for himself after coming this far. We started up the aisle. The music still throbbed around us; it was an incongruous note now. I felt a little as if this were a funeral march, but the record was "When the Saints Come Marching In"! Which isn't exactly a funeral march these days.

I said, "Why'd you kill the guy, Spade?"

"Personal thing. He was the only guy knew I shot that cop after the Western-Federal job. He was cracking up, first the booze, then H. Sooner or later the cops would sweat

him, keep him off the dope—and my tail would be in the sling. Just one of those things that had to be done. Like this."

We were twenty or thirty feet up the aisle when a weird sense of unreality started creeping over me. I thought I had heard a squeal—one of those high-pitched feminine squeals you sometimes hear . . .

I shook it off, took another step. Couldn't be. Just something wrong with my ears. Then I heard it again. Either my ears were getting very musical, or . . . I knew. All of a horrible sudden, I knew.

Before I stopped, before I turned my head and looked, before the sight actually walloped me in the eyes, I knew what was happening. As I stopped stock still and started craning my head around, and Spade mumbled something I didn't catch, I heard it again: *"Yee-yi!"* it sounded like. High and full and fruity.

"No . . ." I said to myself, aloud, my voice hollow. "No . . . It can't be . . ."

It was.

Robbie. There she was, on the stage, gliding about, wiggling, gyrating. She wore a pink brassière and pink pants and was twirling her skirt around her head. *"Eee-yi-ooh!"* she went.

Spade shook all over, yanked his head around, and gawked at me, his face twitching. "What in the—" he said.

My mind was racing—every which way. He might decide just to shoot me. He might decide to shoot Robbie. He might decide anything. He backed over against the seats at the edge of the aisle, moved up a couple of feet to where he could watch me and the stage at the same time.

"What in the—" he said again.

I didn't say anything. My mind refused to function. I opened my mouth, in there trying, but nothing came out.

On the stage: "Eeee-ooo-*eee!*"

The skirt had gone flying through the air, and her brassière was sliding off. While she swayed and gyrated and snapped her head, brush of auburn hair flying wickedly.

When the Saints . . . come marching in . . . POM—POM!

When the Saints—POM—*Come marching*—POM—*in* . . . POM-POM!

Oh, she was glorious, stupendous, unbelievable. Only I couldn't enjoy a bit of it. Not a glide. Not a POM! I broke out in a cold sweat, then hot flashes, then got gooey all over. My brain seemed to unravel, crumble, get soupy.

I couldn't think straight. What in the hell did she think she was doing up there? Why here? Why now? Why?

Spade's head snapped back and forth, from me to the stage, his jaw sagging about half an inch. He was bewildered—even more bewildered than I. And a small surge of hope fluttered in me. His snaps were getting less snappy. He was looking more at the stage, just rolling his eyeballs back toward me.

And slowly hope turned to cer-

tainty. My confusion disappeared, my thoughts steadied, focused. In a moment of peculiar clarity it seemed that this had a kind of inevitability about it, and all I had to do now was let it happen, merely watch history unroll while I played my small part in it.

5.

Because history, I suddenly realized, was now repeating itself. This was essentially the same scene with which all the trouble had started. Same girl, Robbie; same dance; same guy, me; same lousy intruder, Spade. Except that it then had been on the beach and was now in a theater, all of the original elements were again present—only, like a big flea with small cats on it, the positions were reversed.

Then it had been Spade who ruined everything for me—and maybe for Robbie. Now, with Robbie's marvelous help, I was going to ruin everything for Spade. It seemed a thing of beauty, almost poetic: *Justice!*

I almost smiled as Spade's eyes wobbled toward me and then snapped back toward the stage. In a kind of starchy tone, stiff and yet gummy, he said: "Do you see what I see?"

"What are you talking about? I don't see anything."

It was a hot flash of inspiration. Logic would tell him this couldn't be happening. If I agreed with logic, he might get completely unstrung.

"But—that music," he said.

"What music?"

He twitched. "Don't you hear the music? Don't you hear the music?"

"What music?"

"Something is cuckoo."

"Spade," I said, "you are getting all pale, Spade."

On the stage, plenty of movement.

Just high-heeled shoes and pink pants now. And Robbie's hands were at the top of the pink, diddling and dawdling as she had diddled and dawdled that grand afternoon at the beach. I remembered how that sight had transfixed me, riveted my entire attention even while murder had flickered in the corner of my eye. I took a deep breath, squeezed the fingers of my right hand together.

"She's *there!*" Spade cried. "Hear the music?"

"Spade, you're getting awfully pale."

I guess at this point he didn't care if he turned purple. Spade hadn't forgotten me completely, but I was growing less important by the minute. It was inevitable. Robbie's fourth dimension had practically zoomed into the fifth, and now she was approaching the most climactic climax this stage—maybe any stage—had ever experienced.

Down slipped the pink, then it was a pink blur in her hand, and a moment later flying through the air. Spade's jaw sagged two more inches.

Robbie gyrated, wound up. The music was screeching to a nerve-shattering peak of wildness. Any second it was going to happen. It was, I knew, going to be memorable,

marvelous. Something had happened to Robbie up there. She knew she had an audience, she was on stage, doing the thing she'd always wanted to do, and it was as though slow lightning flowed through her. She was getting rid of those repressions and suppressed desires all at once, flinging them every which way, and she had in these moments risen to peaks of magnificence even she might never reach again.

And, as I moved toward Spade, a kind of hot sadness wallowed all over me. I'd missed her three masterpieces on the beach, and now I was going to miss the grandest one of all. But it was sure doing the trick. I pulled my eyes from Robbie and looked at Spade, stepped toward him. Spade didn't know I was there. He didn't know he was there. All he knew was that *Robbie* was there.

He was bent slightly forward, stretched taut like a bowstring and sort of tilted toward the stage, his eyes stretched wide and protruding just a little. His mouth flopped open completely and his gun wavered a full six inches. I planted my feet solidly, hauled back my right arm, wound my fingers into a fist like a gob of cement, and started to launch the blow.

I must have started to launch at the same split second as Robbie started to launch. The music had risen to its crashing crescendo as if the musicians were all busting their lungs. My fist whistled through the air, past my ear, on toward Spade's chops. In that last grand, climactic moment he was transfixed in a kind of rapture. Timed to perfection, the music, Robbie's masterpiece, my fist, and Spade's transfixed expression all blended into a moment of explosive completeness—*POW!*

Spade had completely, entirely, absolutely forgotten about me. His concentration had been totally on Robbie's masterpiece, it was his entire area of being, his all, and that sudden *POW!* must have been the most shocking thing that had ever, ever happened to him. He must have thought the impossible had happened and it had catapulted through space and smacked him. Maybe she was there, maybe she wasn't there, but *something* had sure walloped him a good one.

He didn't go out immediately, there was a delayed reaction of perhaps two or three seconds, as if he were by sheer force of will and Gargantuan desire hanging on in defiance of man and nature. He twirled around, slammed back against the edge of a seat, and there was for a moment on his chops the most stunned and perplexed expression imaginable, a kind of stupefied disbelief blending with petrified contentment.

Then his eyes suddenly looked artificial, his face went blank, and he flopped to the floor.

As he fell, his gun went off. Either he'd convulsively squeezed the trigger, or the impact had fired the gun, but it made a great crash.

I bent over and grabbed the revolver, straightened up as a door

slammed. Feet pounded, getting closer. On the stage Robbie looked toward the entrance of the theater and let out a squeal, hopped four inches up in the air, spun around, and grabbed her clothes, ran off stage. I got a glimpse. Again.

That's all. Just a glimpse. It seemed as if that was all I ever got. Bodies falling, squinty-eyed doctors, safecrackers interrupting everything, doors slamming. I was beginning to get pretty sour about it.

A uniformed policeman ran up. I briefed him quickly, wound it up: "This is the character who did it," and started backstage. Then I stopped, turned to the officer, and said: "Incidentally, when he comes to, don't believe everything he tells you. Some of it may sound strange. We—I hit him pretty hard."

He bent down by Spade. I trotted backstage. Robbie was practically dressed, just zipping up her skirt. As she slipped on her blouse I told her she was marvelous, she'd saved the day, but what in hell had ever possessed her to do it?

"First, I just got away," she said rapidly, a throb of excitement in her voice, "went backstage and hid there. I was scared, that was all I could think of. But then I started worrying about you—then I heard you both talking. I looked, saw you both walking up the aisle, and he was pointing a gun at you. I almost died!"

She paused, eyes wide. "Yes," I said, really interested now. "Go on, go on."

"I knew I had to do something, but I thought: What can *I* do? What can *I* do? I'm only a woman, only a woman. . . . And suddenly it came to me. I couldn't help myself. Something *moved* me."

"It sure moved you in the right directions," I said.

"Actually, there wasn't time to think about it." She chuckled suddenly. "I always wanted to—to, you know—anyway. And all of a sudden I was doing it." She sighed. "It was as if my cocoon dropped away, as if something *told* me."

Her face was flushed, she looked ecstatic.

She sighed again. "I knew if I could get his attention, you'd do something clever."

"Not so clever. All I did was sock him."

"That was clever. Anyway, I knew you'd do *something*. And I thought I knew how to get his attention."

"You sure did. You petrified it. And it was wonderful. Probably saved my life."

"Oh, that," she said, as if it were nothing. "But how was *I*? How was my dancing?"

"Tremendous," I said a little sadly, thinking of how much of it I'd missed. As I thought about that, the sadness started getting a bitter edge to it. Would it *always* be like this? Would history keep repeating itself in a vicious circle? With me always brought to the brink but never shoved over the cliff? Always a bridesmaid and never a bride?

While I was trying to untangle

that, Robbie said: "Shell, how was that last one? The only *real* one. And I did it for an *audience*. It gave me goose bumps."

"Yeah."

All we ever seemed to do was talk about it. It was really starting to sort of burn hell out of me. Here it was all over, and she was buttoning up her blouse.

"Well, how did I look?" she asked.

I could feel the corners of my mouth turning down. "I haven't the faintest idea," I said. "How in hell would I know? I'd be the *last* person to know—"

"I mean there at the end, when I just got all zizzly and went around, and around, and then— Oh, there I go, almost did it again."

"Yeah. Almost. Yeah. It's always almost. Dammit. Yeah."

"Shell, what's the matter?"

"Matter? Nothing's the matter. Dammit. Everything's grand. Swell, dammit. Hunky-dory. Yeah, dammit, I swear—"

"Shell, what in the world is the matter?"

I told her. She put her arms round my neck, pressed close, and said: "Is *that* all?" and spoke in whispers.

"Let's go!" I said.

"Let's go!" she said.

We went.

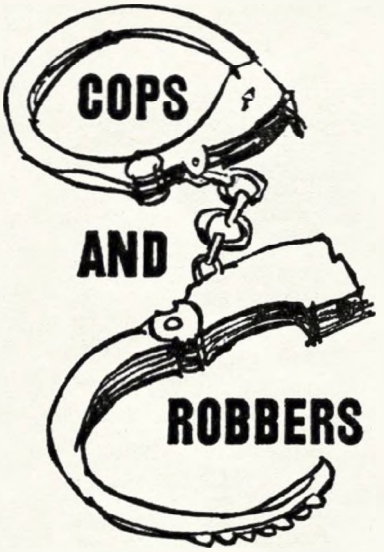
Seldom had such astounding curves been so joyously uncensored. The day was a sparkling Tuesday in July, the place was a secluded half-moon beach, the sun was bright, the air clear, the sand voluptuously warm. . . .

And the girl was Robbie.

Well, friends, that was all months ago. And the spirit which moved Robbie that day continued to move her. Maybe that, too, was inevitable. There was an enormous amount of publicity, and Robbie was all fired up with hot goose bumps anyway. She went on to become the toast of Hollywood, then the toast of New Orleans, Miami, New York—everything but a command performance, which she may get yet. Maybe you saw her here on the coast, or back East—you'd know her name, if I told you. Robbie, of course, is not her real name.

Those next months led to several interesting escapades, some involving me. . . .

But that's another story.



VINCENT H. GADDIS

HIS MAN FRIDAY

Investigating vandalism on a farm near Evansville, Indiana, where a tractor had been wrecked, Deputy Sheriff James Angus quickly surveyed the scene, then settled down to looking for clues. He found a perfect heelprint and made a cast. The print was compared with the shoes of several suspects, but it didn't match.

Several days later Angus sat down in the sheriff's office and crossed his legs. Fellow deputies looked at Angus's heel and did a double take. Angus had found his own footprint!

CASTE CLASSIFICATION

In Philadelphia a narcotics peddler was on trial before Judge Maurice W. Sporkin. The judge asked the arresting officer: "Were the sales of dope made only to the police?"

"No," replied the policeman. "The accused sold dope to people, too."

INTERNATIONAL TASTES

Los Angeles police report that a burglar broke into a home and confined his thefts to the kitchen. He ate a can of Mexican enchiladas, a jar of chili peppers, half-a-dozen Spanish tamales, a can of Irish stew, and part of a carton of chop suey. He washed the food down with a fifth of Holland gin and some California sherry. Officers checked city hospitals for patients requiring the use of stomach pumps but failed to turn up any suspects.

EMBARRASSED PRODIGAL

Dennis Anson, twenty-five, rang the bell at the gates of Leicester Prison in England and surrendered. He had escaped earlier while serving a sentence for larceny. Anson told the guards that he had returned voluntarily because he had split his trousers while climbing over a wall.

PILLAGE BY THE PINT

A polite gunman in Spokane, Washington, robbed a bank—the Community Blood Bank—of four pints of blood. Evelyn Miller, the attendant, said the stranger displayed a small pistol when he approached the counter where she was typing blood samples. He demanded four pints of O negative blood, plus four administration sets—hookups of plastic

tubes, filters, and needles. Miss Miller added that the robber was "very calm and cultured," and was careful never to point his weapon directly at her.

READY REMEDY

Thomas Glovemore, fifty-two, of Syracuse, New York, insisted on taking a sack containing almost a hundred bottles of medicine when he was sentenced to jail for panhandling. Asked why he had so much medicine, Glovemore replied: "That's easy. Sometimes I don't feel good—like right now."

SCALPED

A Shriner at the organization's convention in Memphis, Tennessee, reported to police that two men swiped his maroon fez from his head. "I don't mind so much the loss of my fez," he explained, "but they got my toupee with it."

MYSTERY GIRL

Probably the most astonishing series of mistaken identifications ever made in the United States occurred in October, 1934, in Kansas City, Kansas. The body of a redhaired girl, aged about twenty-two, with blue eyes, a freckled face, and peculiar scars on each ankle, was found in a ditch along a rural road near the city. She had been shot to death.

She was "positively" identified as twenty-six different young women by nearly a hundred and fifty persons who viewed the body. In one alleged identification, eighteen persons agreed that the murder victim was a girl listed as missing.

After seven months all twenty-six girls were found to be alive. Finally "Miss X" was buried—still unidentified.

REMOTE CONTROL ROBBERY

Even if Los Angeles police apprehend the thief who robbed William Elrod, a service-station attendant, of $250, he won't be able to identify him. In fact, the robber was never in sight.

It all began with a telephone call. "Listen carefully," the voice told Elrod. "I have a rifle trained on your back. To prove I can see you, you have your foot on the bench. Take all the money from your cash register and put it in the trash can in the rest room of the drive-in next door, then return to the station. I'll be watching you."

Elrod followed instructions, then called police. The trash can was checked, but the money was gone.

PIECEWORK

In Rouyn, Quebec, police arrested Marc Gratton, a thirty-one-year-old welder, for larceny on the installment plan. He removed an entire underground pump from the Quemont Gold Mine—in his lunch pail, piece by piece, over a three-year period. Officers found the reassembled pump in the basement of Gratton's home. Six policemen worked three hours loading the equipment on a truck for its trip back to the mine. 87

THE CROWD WANTED RONNIE TO DIE—AND WHAT RONNIE SAID JUST DIDN'T MATTER AT ALL...

HELEN NIELSEN

CONFESSION

THE MOB THAT HAD CROWDED into the sheriff's office closed in ominously on Ronnie Edwards, making him feel cowed and small in the straight-backed chair. He stood six foot two, if they had allowed him to stand; he weighed one hundred and eighty pounds, was a crack shot, expert swimmer, hottest driver on the drag strip, and star tackle at Desert Bend Union High. He had a blond flat top and clear blue eyes that make the chicks tremble. He was Mr. Big until the mob taught him that even a grown man can be filled with such fear that his mind fogs and his mouth goes as dry as flannel. "Tell them, Ronnie!" Lisa cried. "Don't let them kill us! Tell them that you did it! Tell them!"

Ronnie looked up. Lisa's face was above him, briefly, and in that instant Ronnie wondered why she had ever thought that he loved her.

"Nobody's going to kill you," the sheriff said. "Go home, Matt. Take your angry friends and go home."

"And let this punk get away with murder?"

Matt was the one Ronnie feared most. He wasn't as big as the sheriff; he didn't seem to have an official capacity. But he had hate in him. The sheriff didn't.

"He's not getting away with anything," the sheriff said, "and nobody's been murdered."

"My wife!" Matt roared.

The sound of his voice made Ronnie's blood run cold. It was worse than Lisa's.

"Mister," he had yelled, "I didn't kill your wife! I never saw your wife!" But that had been hours ago, before all of the angry people had crowded into Sheriff Thompson's jail with hatred and revenge in their eyes. Now Ronnie couldn't find a voice.

"My wife," Matt choked. "lying on a slab over in Fenton's mortuary —and this punk grinning in your office."

Not grinning. Ronnie's mind protested. *Gritting my teeth to keep from screaming!*

". . . seventeen years old by his driver's license! You know what that means, Tommy? He's a minor. He's got a pa—a rich pa by the looks of the car he was driving. He'll be here soon with an expensive lawyer and the kid will get off with a lecture from a judge and maybe six months with an understanding psychiatrist. No, sir! I'm not leaving here—none of us are leaving here—until we see this boy sign a confession that he ran down and killed my wife. I'm not going to let him get away with it. No drunken, punk kid—"

Ronnie couldn't stand any more of it. "I wasn't drunk!" he yelled. "I wasn't drunk!"

It had started a couple of hours ago out on the highway. It was only beer—a six-pack stuffed in a picnic bag and cooled by a can of frozen water. Champagne would have been more appropriate. Champagne was what usually went with a wedding.

"Ronnie," Lisa scolded, "don't drive so fast while you're drinking!"

Ronnie drained the can and careened it off the side of the Jaguar.

"Woman," he said. He curled his right arm about her waist and pulled her close to him. "Don't you ever give me orders, understand? I want a wife, not a commanding officer."

"Yes, sir," she said meekly.

The road ahead was like a silver arrow across the desert. Ronnie ducked his head and gave her a quick kiss.

"I like that," he said. "I like that, 'Yes, sir.' Give me that and we'll have no trouble."

Lisa sighed and fitted herself into the hollow of his arm. It was sweet. She smelled of perfume and powder. Her hair was as soft as kitten fur,

and her body was warm against his body.

"That's why I flipped for you," Ronnie told her. "You're not like other girls—always trying to tell a guy what to do. You make a guy feel like he can do things for himself."

He ducked his head and inhaled deeply of her hair. Even with the top down, and the speedometer needling seventy, he could go half-crazy from the smell of her hair. Lisa was the girl he was going to marry as soon as they reached Las Vegas. She was right for him. She would never rob him of his manhood. When she leaned over and switched on the radio, it was at just the right time. When she tuned in the music, it was just the right beat. Before he could ask her, she found the picnic basket and opened another can. But it was only beer . . .

"I wasn't drunk!" Ronnie yelled. "I had two cans of beer. You can't get drunk on two cans of beer!"

His words had a remarkable effect. The sound of his voice split open the fear and left him quivering in the broken shell of it, surrounded by wretched faces that now remembered him, a human being, instead of just their hatred.

The man named Matt recovered first.

"If you weren't drunk," he challenged. "why didn't you see my wife?"

"I don't know," Ronnie answered.

"Well, I know. You *were* drunk. You were driving like a bat out of you know where. I saw that myself—" Matt turned to the sheriff. "My eyes are good, Sheriff," he said. "Ask Clemson down the street. He fitted my glasses a couple of weeks ago. With them on my eyes are as good as yours, and I saw this boy's car speeding down the highway just before your deputy there stopped him. I say he's a killer, and I want him to confess."

"Confess . . . confess!"

Ronnie raised his hands to close out the words. They were pulled away, roughly, by a young man in sun-tans with "Deputy" embroidered on his sleeve. Ronnie looked up and saw a face twisted with contempt—not for Ronnie, who was just a pair of arms to pinion, but for everything that was happening in the sheriff's office. Most of all, for the sheriff himself. Ronnie's eyes dropped to the gun on the sheriff's hip and he knew quite clearly how much the deputy would like for him to make a break, giving him the chance to unload a slug in his back. Come election time he would snow under Sheriff Thompson, who was soft on that drunken killer. In the approximate time it took to blink his eye, Ronnie saw all of that; because the scales of adolescence had been washed away.

"Did you see the accident?" Sheriff Thompson challenged.

Ronnie waited for the answer along with the sheriff.

"Nobody saw the accident," Matt said. "You know that. But I did see

this boy's car speeding away from the Route 6 intersection. He'd slowed down—I was maybe two hundred feet away—but I could see that he'd slowed down, and then, suddenly, he drove on—fast. I wondered why anyone would head into town so fast. Then I walked on to the intersection and found"—Matt's face worked terribly. His voice broke —"and found Gertrude lying on the highway."

Suddenly the angry face swung toward Lisa.

"You"—he charged—"a woman! A woman on her way to be married, you tell us. What kind of woman would let a boy drive on and leave a victim he'd struck down lying in her own blood on the highway?"

"I didn't tell him to drive on!" Lisa cried. "I told him to stop!"

When Ronnie heard that, Matt's words had a kind of wisdom in them. *What kind of woman are you?* he wondered. *What kind of woman would tell such a lie? You didn't tell me anything at all!*

He could remember it more clearly now. The music had dug deep and flowed sweet. Lisa hummed to it, cradled in the hollow of his shoulder, and happiness was a sharp wrench that tingled all through his body. It might have been like that all the way to Vegas, except for the kid with the stripped Caddy.

The first time he cut past, Ronnie hardly noticed. He had other things on his mind. A few miles farther along he passed the Caddy, still only vaguely aware that it was filled with teenagers bent on thrills. Minutes later the big sedan passed again, cutting close.

"Okay," Ronnie said, pulling his arm away from Lisa, "if that's what you want—"

He grabbed the steering wheel with both hands and began to pressure the accelerator. The distance between the two cars was sucked under the wheels of the Jag until he could see the faces grinning at him out of the back window of the Caddy. Seconds later he was pulling alongside—and that's when the trouble began. When he tried to pass, the Caddy cut over, crowding him toward the opposite shoulder. When he fell back, the kids in the Caddy yelled taunts and jeers. One of them hurled a bottle that narrowly missed the windshield. A second bottle smashed against the front grille.

"Ronnie," Lisa cried, "be careful! They're all high!"

Ronnie barely heard her. His foot was hard on the accelerator again. This time he cut sharply around the Caddy, giving the driver no time to slide over. For a few seconds they raced hood to hood. The shower of jeers grew to a howling shriek that faded and died as the Jag left the Caddy behind. A mile down the highway Ronnie began to ease off the accelerator. He glanced at Lisa. She was wiping her face with a handkerchief.

"They hurt you!" he cried.

She shook her head. "It's only beer—" She paused and sniffed of

the handkerchief she'd been using to sponge her face. "—No, it's whisky. Can you imagine—kids like that? I'll bet the driver wasn't over fifteen."

"I should have run him off the road," Ronnie said.

"Oh, Ronnie, what if the police—?"

Ronnie pulled his foot off the pedal and watched the needle dip to a legal speed. Lisa was right. They were eloping to Vegas, and they were minors. A scrape with the police would mean a call back to Desert Bend and two irate families messing up everything. Nothing was worth that risk. When the Caddy roared down on them again, Ronnie slowed and let it pass. A second invitation to race was ignored until the kids gave up in disgust and roared on. Only then did Ronnie resume speed.

It was several miles farther along that Lisa cried out. Ronnie had glimpsed a sign "Gila Fork" off to his right. Small towns could be speed traps. He began to slow, and then, suddenly, something was happening up ahead. He wasn't sure what it was—a dog on the pavement, perhaps. He yanked the wheel of the Jag to the left.

"Ronnie—"

Lisa didn't scream. Her cry was strange—almost frightened. Ronnie looked at her. Her face had gone white. He glanced at the rear-view mirror, and then two things occurred simultaneously. The first was the way time stopped for an instant—the instant required to see the woman lying on the highway; the second was the way his foot turned to lead on the accelerator.

That was the way it had happened —not the way Lisa said. But she was screaming now. The sound of her voice pulled Ronnie back to the present.

"Ronnie, don't let them take us out of here! Don't let that mob take us anywhere!"

And the man named Matt was leering in his face like something out of a nightmare.

"I say take them over to the mortuary to see what they've done!"

A murmur of assent rose up behind him until Ronnie understood why Lisa was so afraid. Maddened people did mad things. The sheriff's office had become a sanctuary he had to protect.

"I didn't do anything!" he yelled. "All you have to go on is this old man's word, and I say he's a liar. He can't prove anything!"

For an instant his shout pulled back the anger. He looked at Lisa. He was beginning to feel like a man again. And then Matt finished everything.

"Is that so?" he said, against the quiet. "What about that broken glass on the highway?"

Ronnie's head swung back to Matt.

"And what about the broken lens in your right headlamp?"

"What?"

"Yes, what? What about it, murderer? Tommy, I say we take these kids over to the mortuary and see if

we can shock some truth out of them."

"No!" Lisa cried.

"Right now!" Matt shouted.

"No! Ronnie, don't just sit there! Tell them. Tell them the truth! Tell them that you killed that woman!"

Ronnie heard her. She was a total stranger now, but he heard her. She was a girl with a face twisted with fear, thinking of only one thing—her safety. Her own precious safety. Behind her was Matt's ugly face, and beside him was the deputy with his greedy hand itching for the gun that hung inches from his fingers. There it was, all laid out for him with Lisa's voice, no longer sweet and promising, still screaming in his ears.

"Tell them, Ronnie! Tell them!"

Suddenly Ronnie was on his feet.

"All right!" he yelled. "I killed her. I ran over that woman on the highway and killed her! Now leave us alone . . . leave us alone!"

After he signed the confession, Ronnie was left alone for about two hours. He was exhausted, and so he slept. When the deputy awakened him, the sky had turned black outside the windows. He was taken to the front office where Sheriff Thompson was talking earnestly to two state troopers and an officious-looking man who was scanning the confession. Seated beside the sheriff's desk was Lisa. She looked pale and sick.

"Ronnie," Sheriff Thompson said, "this is Mr. Winters from the District Attorney's office."

Winters peered at Ronnie through thick-lensed glasses.

"Were you coerced into signing this confession?" he asked.

Ronnie hesitated. He looked at the sheriff, then at the deputy.

"Were you abused—maltreated? Were you subjected to physical violence?"

"No, sir," Ronnie said.

"You were panicked, is that it?"

Ronnie glanced at Lisa. She stared at her hands in her lap.

"Yes, sir," he said.

"All right, Thompson. Let him go."

Ronnie turned toward the sheriff, bewildered.

"What happened?" he asked.

Sheriff Thompson unlocked his desk and took out Ronnie's personal belongings.

"A car full of half-drunken kids were picked up about an hour ago," he said. "They were driving an old Caddy. The right front fender was dented with particles of blood and hair ground into the dent. The right front lens was broken, and the glass fragments matched those found on the highway near Mrs. Cooley's body. The fragments from your headlamp don't."

Ronnie's mind was suddenly racing. The wild kids in the Caddy—they must have smashed his headlamp with one of those bottles. But that still left one thing unexplained.

"Matt Cooley—" he said.

The sheriff handed him his car keys.

"Yes," he said bitterly, "Matt

Cooley. A man suffering from grief and shock can make an awful fool of himself. He wanted to hurt you because he had been hurt. He wanted the comfort of thinking he was somehow avenging his wife's death. Try to think of it that way, son. It's always easy to make ourselves believe what it's comfortable to believe."

Driving home, Ronnie had plenty of time to think about that. He didn't mention going on to Vegas. Lisa didn't mention it either—or anything else, until he was depositing her at her father's driveway.

"Ronnie," she said, "I only begged you to confess because I was afraid for you. I didn't want you hurt."

That was what she wanted to believe. If he hadn't loathed her so much, Ronnie might have felt sorry for her.

"You might have stood by me," he said.

"But, Ronnie—"

"You might have said, 'No, we didn't hit that woman!' and if I started to break down and say that we did, you could have said, 'No, no, no!' until I couldn't break!"

And then it hit Ronnie, suddenly, that a woman who really loved a man would fight for him—even if fighting for him meant fighting the weakness in him, instead of just saying meekly: "Yes, sir."

He couldn't explain that to Lisa. He gunned the Jaguar and headed for home.

Future File

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GIDEON'S FIRE

A COMPLETE NOVEL BY

J. J. MARRIC

DRUM BEAT

A CHESTER DRUM STORY BY

STEPHEN MARLOWE

AND START WITH

A BLONDE

A FATHER SHANLEY-SAMMY GOLDEN STORY BY

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DEAD IN BED

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THE CRIME IS MURDER

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SPECIAL REPORT

THE PROBERS

BY CAPTAIN

ANTHONY NELLIGAN

CRIME LAB COMMANDER

COPS AND ROBBERS

BY VINCENT H. GADDIS

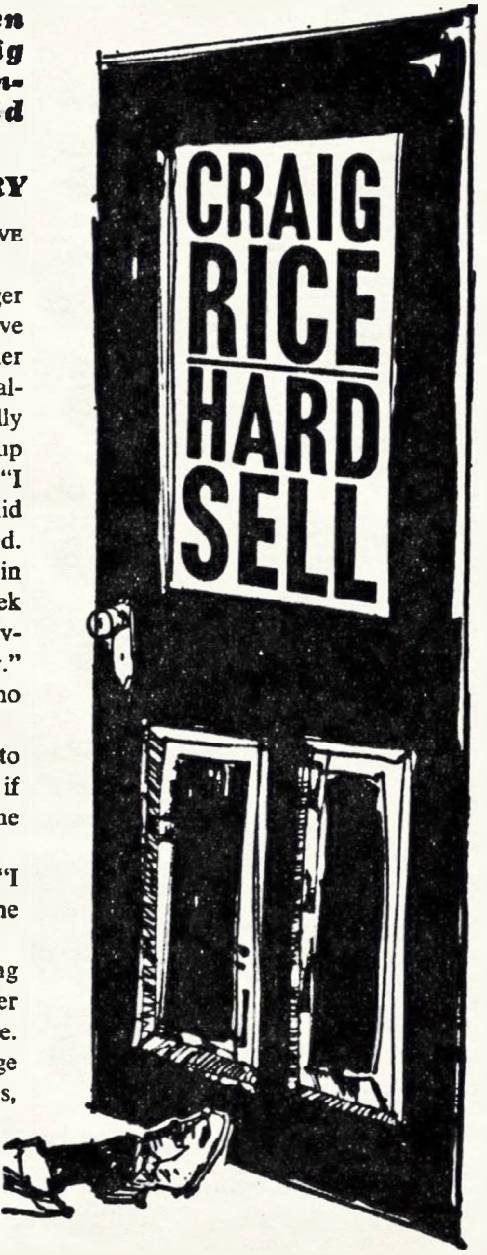
GRAVEYARD SHIFT

AND MANY OTHERS

EVERY STORY NEW!

Four magazine salesmen were dead—and the big problem, Malone told himself, was how to avoid solving the case.

A JOHN J. MALONE STORY



"MALONE," THE VOICE SAID, "YOU'VE got to help me."

The little lawyer waggled a finger at Joe the Angel and sat impassive while the bartender poured another double shot of rye. Then he swallowed the rye, reflecting thoughtfully that clients were always turning up when you needed them the least. "I don't have to help you," he said without bothering to turn around. "My office rent is paid a month in advance. My secretary is paid a week in advance. My bar tab is paid several drinks in advance. So go away."

"Money," said the voice, "is no object."

"That's what I've been trying to tell you," Malone said. "Besides, if you want me, why don't you call me at my office?"

"I tried," the voice admitted. "I talked to a girl named Maggie. She said *this* was your office."

Malone turned around, deciding firmly that Maggie would never again be paid anything in advance. He found himself looking at a large man with iron-gray hair, blue eyes, and a prominent chin. The man looked so healthy that Malone wanted to turn away again. "Go ahead," he said. "Tell me all about it."

"Can't we go someplace private?"

"This is my office," Malone reminded him. "How private can you get?"

The man looked around vacantly, then back at Malone. "My name is Gunderson," he said. "Frank Gunderson. Mean anything to you?"

"Nothing," Malone said. "So far."

"I sell magazine subscriptions," Gunderson announced.

"That's nice," Malone said pleasantly. "Working your way through college?"

Gunderson looked very unhappy "I don't exactly sell them," he explained. "I employ salesmen. Gunderson Sales, Inc. Door-to-door sales of leading magazines. A customer buys one or two magazines and gets another free. It's a very attractive offer."

"I'm sure it is," the little lawyer agreed. "But I can't read. So you're wasting your time."

"You don't understand," Gunderson said. "It's like this, Malone. Somebody's been killing my salesmen. One after the other, day after day, my men have been murdered."

"By prospective customers?"

"By a fiend," Gunderson said. "First Joe Tallmer, struck down brutally by a hit-and-run driver. That was a week ago. Then, two days later, Leon Prince was pushed into an empty elevator shaft. The very next day Howie Kirschmeyer was shoved from an elevated platform and mangled by an oncoming train. And—"

Malone held up a hand, both to silence Gunderson and to summon Joe the Angel. He downed the double rye that Joe poured and fixed sad eyes on Gunderson.

"Accidents," he said soberly, "can happen."

"But, Malone—"

"Three accidents," he went on. "The first one got hit by a car. The second one was too dumb to wait for the elevator. The third one tried to walk across the tracks. It figures, in a way. Anyone dumb enough to sell magazines for a living—"

"You don't understand," Gunderson cut in. "There was a fourth one. Just this morning."

"What happened to him?"

"He was shot through the head with a .45," Gunderson said. "He's dead," he added unnecessarily.

John J. Malone suddenly felt very tired. "Sounds like murder," he admitted. "But I'm sure the police can take care of it."

"I don't see how," Gunderson said. "The man's name was Henry Littleton. He was sitting over coffee while his wife was upstairs making the beds or something. Somebody came in, shot him, and left."

"The gun?"

"It was on the breakfast-room table. No prints, no registration."

"Hmmmm," Malone said.

"You see," Gunderson continued, "the police can do nothing. Littleton wasn't murdered by someone who knew him. He was murdered for the same reason as Tallmer and Prince and Kirschmeyer."

"And why were *they* murdered?"

"I wish I knew," Gunderson said. "I wish I knew."

Malone paused to light a cigar. "Come, now," he said gently. "You must have some idea. Otherwise you wouldn't be here annoying me."

Gunderson hesitated. "Malone," he said, "I don't want to sound paranoid. Not good, sounding paranoid. But I think someone is trying to ruin me, Malone. Killing my men one after the other. Crippling my sales force. Two of my men quit me today, Malone. Left me cold. Told me they couldn't take the chance of working for me. One of 'em said he had a wife and kid. Hell, *I've* got a wife and kid. Two kids, as a matter of fact. And—"

"Shut up for a minute," the little lawyer said absently. "Who would want to cripple your sales force? You have any competition in this little con game of yours?"

Gunderson colored. "It's not a con game. But I do have a competitor."

"Does he have a name?"

"Tru-Val Subscriptions," Gunderson said.

Malone sighed. "That's a strange name for a man," he remarked. "What do they call him for short? Troovie?"

"That's the company name, Malone. The man's name is Harold Cowperthwaite."

Malone looked around vacantly. He could understand the murder of door-to-door salesmen, especially if such murder were performed by dissident customers. But he didn't *want* to understand, not now. He didn't want the case at all.

"Malone? Here's a check. Twenty-five hundred dollars. I'll have another check for twenty-five hundred for you when you clear this up. Plus expenses, of course. Will that be sufficient?"

Malone took the check and found a place for it in his wallet. He nodded pleasantly at Gunderson and watched the man leave the City Hall Bar, walking with a firm stride, arms swinging, chest out. Then he looked around until he found Joe the Angel again and pointed to his empty glass. It was, he decided, time to begin piling up expenses for Gunderson.

Harold Cowperthwaite was not helpful. He looked as sickly as Gunderson looked vigorous, and was just about as much fun to be with. Malone decided that he disliked them both equally.

"—incredible accusation!" Cowperthwaite had just finished shouting. "A couple of his doorbell punchers keel over and he blames me for it! Blames me for everything! Ought to sue him for libel! Serve him right!"

Malone sighed, wishing the little man wouldn't talk exclusively in exclamation points. "Then you didn't kill them," he suggested.

"Kill them!" boomed Cowperthwaite. "Course I didn't kill them! I wanted to kill anybody I'd kill Gunderson! Know what I think, Malone?"

Malone was totally unprepared for

the question mark. "Hmmm," he said. "What *do* you think?"

"Think he killed 'em himself!" Cowperthwaite shouted. "Throw suspicion on me! Make trouble for me! People bothering me all the time!"

"Oh," said Malone. "No, he couldn't have done that."

"No?"

"Of course not," Malone said. "He's my client."

Cowperthwaite's words followed the lawyer out of the door marked *Tru-Val Subscriptions.* Malone managed to close the door before the man reached the exclamation point. It was, he decided, a day for small triumphs.

"The way I see it," von Flanagan said, "we wait until he kills another one. Then maybe he leaves a clue."

"He?" Malone said, lost. "Who he?"

"The killer," the big cop said. "The bird who killed Littleton and the others without leaving a trace. Pretty soon he'll find another magazine salesman and kill him. Maybe we get lucky and catch him in the act. Wouldn't that be nice?"

"For everybody but the magazine salesman," Malone agreed. "You don't seem to be taking much of an interest in this one. Something wrong?"

"Plenty," von Flanagan said. "For one thing, it's an impossible one to solve. For another, I don't want to solve it."

"Why not?"

Von Flanagan shook his head wearily. "Malone," he said, "have you ever had a run-in with a magazine salesman? Have you ever had one of those little monsters stick his foot in your door and tell you how much you needed his rotten magazines? Have you, Malone?"

Malone nodded.

"They should kill every last one of them," von Flanagan said. "I mean it, Malone. Anybody kills a magazine salesman he deserves a medal."

Malone sighed. "The case," he reminded von Flanagan. "Let's talk about the case. Tell me all about it. Everything."

"There's not much to tell," von Flanagan said, relaxing into a chair. "This Littleton is thirty-three years old, has a wife and two kids. One is a boy and the other—"

"—is a girl," Malone guessed.

"You know the story? Then why bother me?"

"I'm sorry," Malone said, sorry. "Please go on."

"He's a hustler," said von Flanagan. "Holds down two jobs at once. Works real hard. Sells magazines evenings for this Gunderson character and works nine to five in a garage. Hasn't got any money, though. He's had a tough run of luck lately. Doctor bills, things going wrong with the kids, you know. But he's not in debt either. A good, steady guy. A guy you might like if he wasn't a magazine salesman."

"The crime," Malone said gently.

"Murder," von Flanagan said. "Not by the wife, either. I thought

of that, Malone. I didn't want to because she's such a sweet little woman. A doll. But she was upstairs with the kids at the time. The kids said so. They wouldn't lie. Too young to lie."

Malone lit a cigar. "He was shot by somebody inside the house?"

Von Flanagan nodded. "At close range," he said. "It almost looked as though the killer wanted to make it look like suicide. But he didn't try very hard. No powder burns, for one thing, and the gun was lying near Littleton's left hand. And he was right-handed. We checked."

"Clever of you," the lawyer said. "So it was murder, and not by the wife. How about the other salesmen? Tallmer and Prince and Kirkenberger?"

"Kirschmeyer," von Flanagan corrected. "That's the funny part of it. Tallmer was a typical hit-and-run. Prince and Kirschmeyer look more like accidents than most accidents. But with them all coming together like this—"

"I know," Malone said gloomily. "Did Littleton have any insurance?"

"Insurance?" von Flanagan looked lost. "Oh," he said. "Littleton, insurance. Yeah. A big policy. But that's out, Malone. The wife is the only beneficiary and she's clear. So that's out."

"Thanks," Malone said. "So am I."

"So are you what?"

"Out," Malone said. "For a drink."

With two double ryes under his belt and a pair of beer chasers keeping them company, Malone felt in condition to use the phone. He called Charlie Stein, a useful little man who served as Dun and Bradstreet for a world far removed from Wall Street, running credit checks for gamblers and similarly unsavory elements.

"Take your time on this one," he told Stein. "Nothing urgent. I want to find out if there's anything around on a man named Henry Littleton. And," he added sadly, "there probably isn't."

"You're wrong," Stein said. "There is."

Malone came back to life. "Go on," he said. "Talk to me."

"Henry Littleton," Stein said. "He's into Max Hook for seventy-five grand. That all you want to know?"

"That's impossible," Malone said. "I mean—"

"Impossible but true."

"Oh," Malone said. "Well, you better cross him off, Charlie. Somebody shot him in the head."

Malone hung up quickly, then lifted the receiver again and put through a call to Max Hook. The gambler picked up the phone almost at once. "Malone, Max," Malone said cheerfully. "You didn't order a hit for a guy named Henry Littleton, did you?"

"Littleton? That's the fink who owes me seventy-five grand. Seventy-five grand he owes me and a nickel at a time he pays me. That guy." There was a pause. Then, with the air of someone just now hearing

what Malone said in the first place, Hook said: "You saying somebody chilled him?"

"This morning. It wasn't you, was it?"

"Of course not," Hook said. "Why kill somebody who owes me money? That doesn't make sense, Malone."

"I didn't think it did," Malone said pleasantly. "Just checking, Max." He put the receiver on the hook and made his way back to the bar.

"You don't look so hot," Joe the Angel said thoughtfully. "You want me to leave the bottle?"

Malone sighed. "Don't be ridiculous," he said. "Then I wouldn't have anybody to talk to." He closed his eyes and tried to think. This Littleton had been hard-working, honest, and seventy-five thousand dollars in debt. Hook hadn't killed him, and Cowperthwaite hadn't killed him, and his wife hadn't killed him, and he hadn't committed suicide. The whole thing was terrifying.

"I'm glad I found you," von Flanagan was saying. "You're drunk, but I'm still glad I found you. I want to tell you you've been wasting your time. We thought there was a connection between the salesmen. But there isn't."

"You're wrong," Malone said magnificently. "But go on anyway."

"Tallmer," von Flanagan said, ignoring the interruption. "The first one. A guy walked into the stationhouse and said he was the hitter-and-runner. Conscience was bothering him. And there was no connection between him and the rest. Accidents. Like we figured."

"Wrong," said Malone sadly. "Completely wrong."

"Huh?"

"I'll explain," said Malone. "I will tell all. I sort of thought something like this would happen." He sighed. "Tallmer was a typical hit-and-run. That much you know."

"That much I just told you."

Malone nodded. "Prince and Kirschenblum—"

"Kirschmeyer."

"To hell with it," said Malone. "Anyway, the two of them were murdered. By the same person who killed Littleton."

"If you're so smart," said von Flanagan, "then you can tell me that person's name. The one who killed them all."

"Simple," said Malone. "The name is Littleton."

He explained while von Flanagan sat there gaping. "Littleton was in debt," he said. "Seventy-five grand in debt. With no way out. Then Tallmer got hit by a car."

"Precisely," said von Flanagan.

"And Littleton got an idea," he said. "He wanted to kill himself but he didn't want his wife to lose the insurance. So he killed himself and made it look like murder."

Malone lit a fresh cigar. "He set up a chain," he went on. "Chucked Prince down an elevator shaft and heaved Kirschengruber in front of the elevated."

"Kirschmeyer."

"You know who I mean. Anyway,

Littleton did this, and set up a chain. A subtle chain. Then he shot himself."

"Left-handed? From a distance?"

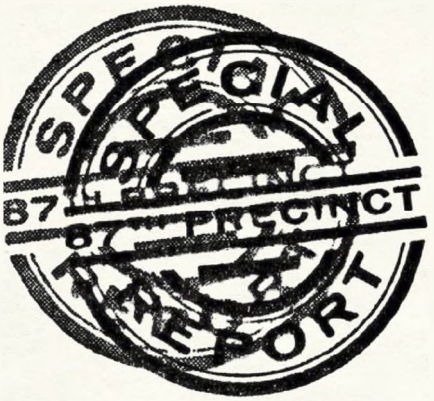
"Of course," Malone said. "If you wanted to make it look like murder, would you use your right hand and put the gun in your mouth? See?"

Von Flanagan thought it over. "So it's suicide," he said. "And we write it off as murder and suicide, with Littleton the murderer. Right?"

"Wrong," Malone said. "You write Prince and Kicklebutton off as accidents and Littleton as murder by person or persons unknown. If he went to all that trouble there's no sense in conning the wife and kids out of the insurance. Besides, you'd never get a suicide verdict. Not unless I persuaded the coroner's inquest. And I won't."

Von Flanagan shrugged. "How are you going to collect your fee?"

"I'll tell Gunderson his salesmen are safe," Malone said. "I'll offer to repay the fee in full if another one gets murdered. And if that's not enough for him, he can keep the twenty-five hundred he owes me. Remember, I didn't want this case in the first place."



REASONABLE FACSIMILE

REX LARDNER

FORGERS AND COUNTERFEITERS, AS A class, are the most versatile of crooks and very likely the most persistent. While their creative skills differ—some relying on the gullibility of the public and others grimly trying to baffle the experts—they are an audacious, generally conscientious lot, proud of their artistic calling.

Some are quite whimsical. A check forger in California obtained cash for a check he signed "I. Nogota." Other signatures similarly honored have been U. R. Stung and N. O. Funds. Still another practitioner of what is called white-collar larceny received money for a check drawn on his account in the East Bank of the Mississippi.

Despite care, some make slips. A short, toothless New York paper-money counterfeiter named Edward Mueller spelled the name of the first President wrong on his one-dollar bills. He spelled it WAHSINGTON. It should have been a tipoff to the recipient that he was getting Brand X money, but the Secret Service observes sadly that few people peer closely at a one-dollar bill.

A few count on the blind enthusiasm of hobbyists. Letters from Cleopatra to Mark Antony and from Socrates to Euclid have been sold to collectors of such historical treasures, considered the more valuable, perhaps, because they were written in French. An enterprising salesman of Buffalo Bill pictures—like those formerly sold at Wild West shows—shot them up to five times their worth by ingeniously signing Buffalo Bill's name on them, using a ballpoint pen.

The dissimulation practiced by these rascals, driven by some irrepressible urge to challenge credulity, extends to nearly every field of human endeavor—art, archaeology, the sciences, literature, philately, autograph collecting, show business, gambling, and commerce. Whatever man hath wrought, going far back into the recesses of time, another man has sought to imitate—for self-satisfaction, out of resentment or frustration, or to earn money.

Throughout history people have been duped by phony statues, "undiscovered" plays and poems by famous authors, spurious Mona Lisas, fake rare coins, false wills, doctored documents, reed-filled mummies, bogus antiques bored by counterfeit worms, fraudulent first editions, tap-

estries, and old bones. And scores of other products: *objets d'art,* fossils, collectors' items, and legal instruments.

The balance today is weighted less toward stone axes and lace than toward forged sweepstakes tickets, race-track tickets, liquor stamps, and orchestra seats for hit musicals, but the art has not died out. As befits the present age, characterized by our preoccupation with advertising, automobiles, and commerce unsullied by the use of cash, today's booming forgeries are in the fields of trademark reproduction, auto licenses, and personal checks.

It is an oddity of human nature that while pickpockets arouse our disdain and muggers our fury, we are quite tolerant of most persons engaged in criminal fraud, forgery, and counterfeiting.

Perhaps it is because they are intellectual crimes, proving, in the area of shrewdness anyway, the superiority of man over the apes. Perhaps it is because the wily perpetrators of these offenses appear to be loners, valiantly pitting their wits against experts, bureaucrats, and other entrenched specialists whose dignity it is pleasant, now and again, to see punctured.

Another reason might be that duplicity of one sort or another is practiced in many legitimate business operations, in politics, diplomacy, the drama, and poker. Forgery, in its various guises, becomes merely a formalized and more dangerous projection of the art of deceit.

In the case of counterfeiting money, moreover, it is likely that most of us suffer from pangs of conscience and can identify, to a degree, with that familiar of the funny-money manufacturer, the passer. Having got stuck with a phony fifty-cent piece or five-dollar bill, we are roguishly tempted to sting someone else with it. This is preferable, certainly, to turning it in to the police, as the law demands, and a) accepting the tacit label of sucker and b) losing the value of the money.

For the successful forger of paintings, such as the late Hans van Megeeren, who in the 1940's drew and scientifically aged "Vermeers," we feel not admiration but awe. Here was a much-scorned artist, a tiny man with the knowledge and skill to make complete idiots out of the haughty art experts! In fact, although Van Megeeren confessed the forgeries and outlined in detail how and where he committed them, some critics keep insisting that Vermeer *must* have painted some of the Van Megeerens. There can be no higher tribute to a forger.

From a moral standpoint, wry appreciation of the talents of a Van Megeeren is understandable. For who is hurt? No damage is done except to the notion of infallibility of the critics and to the silk-lined pocketbook of the purchaser. On the other hand, the damage done by a man who gets his inspiration from the Bureau of Printing and Engraving, or its equivalent, can be monumental. Not only the shopkeeper, inn-

keeper, and gas-station owner suffer; the economy of an entire nation can be destroyed by the widespread circulation of counterfeit money.

Sturdy Venetian banks were staggered back on their heels in 1470 by the tactics of Duke Gallazeo Sforza of Milan, who made handsome counterfeits of the money of Venice during his war against that city. The idea has been adopted by many warring factions since—by Napoleon against the English, by Pitt against the French. It has been tried in time of peace—the most notable attempt being that of an Austrian prince named Ludwig Windischgraetz. The prince, who had political ambitions in Hungary and a grudge against France, planned in 1923 to print one hundred million dollars' worth of 1,000-franc notes for a double purpose—to finance a Hungarian putsch and to destroy France's financial structure. The counterfeits were clumsy, however, the scheme fell through, and the prince, arrested by Hungarian police, was sentenced to four years at hard labor.

Sometimes a quick solution to the budget problem can be more damaging to a country's economy than a tricky enemy. Nero, Henry VIII, and Frederick the Great ruined the financial structures of their respective countries by issuing debased currency. It was legal and possibly necessary counterfeiting but no less disastrous. Potatoes replaced money.

Since counterfeiting has long been the prerogative of rulers—Polycrates of Samos and Queen Elizabeth also indulged—most of them have taken a dim view of competition by amateurs. The earliest counterfeiters, who clipped coins and made new ones from the shavings, had their ears clipped when caught. King Canute decreed that their hands should be cut off. The Romans deprived counterfeiters of their citizenship and then removed their ears and noses. Later, these steps not considered sufficiently discouraging, their ears, noses, hands, and feet were cut off and what was left was served to hungry lions. One *presumes* they were hungry. During the Renaissance punishment was equally severe. The counterfeiter's hands and feet were removed, his eyes were gouged out, and he was drawn, quartered, and put together again so he could be burned at the stake. Counterfeiting remained a flourishing profession, but there were few second-offenders.

In the American colonies in the 1600's, because cash money was scarce, wampum was used as currency. At first the Indians fooled the settlers with phony wampum, but soon the wily white man turned the tables. Counterfeit wampum made of glass beads was secretly made in England and shipped to America. For a while it fooled the Indians; then wampum currency collapsed.

Counterfeiters of bills of credit—which replaced wampum—were punished, when caught, by being forced to sit in the pillory for an hour, losing an ear, and spending a year in jail. In the pattern of these things,

the penalty was not tough enough. So it was jumped to a public whipping, loss of both ears, and being nailed to the pillory. But this did not stop the collapse of currency based on bills of credit.

During the Revolution, in order to create a financial panic among the rebels, the British Government flooded America with fake Continental dollars. In New York Lord Howe advertised sales of counterfeit Continentals for "persons going to the other colonies." Soon American counterfeiters refused to counterfeit the worthless notes (there is good in everything) and Congress solved the problem by recalling $20,000,000 in Continental currency and destroying it.

Taking a leaf from Howe, Napoleon, and Prince Ludwig, whose operations he studied closely, Adolf Hitler in 1940 launched the biggest and most carefully planned counterfeiting enterprise in history. It was called Operation Bernhard; its original purpose was to destroy the Bank of England.

The immediate supervisor of the project, reporting directly to Heinrich Himmler, was a German Secret Service major, Friedrich Walter Bernhard Kruger, formerly a textile machine engineer. The plan was to print a billion dollars' worth of British pound notes of various denominations and dump most of them by plane over the British Isles. Most Britishers, it was hoped, would go on a spending orgy, bringing about the collapse of the currency.

The project was carried out with great thoroughness. British banknote paper, made of white linen, could not be obtained in quantity, so linen was imported from Turkey, dirtied by rubbing it on oily machines, and then laundered. An operation was set up in a fenced-off, closely guarded area of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, near Oranienburg. From concentration camps all over Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Poland specialists were collected, shipped to Sachsenhausen, and pressed into service. Among them were dentists, engineers, engravers, stereotypists, a bank clerk, a printer, and a professional counterfeiter named Solomon Smolianoff, whose value to the enterprise was inestimable.

After a printing shop and photo and engraving sections were set up, the project got rolling in 1943. Watermarks were introduced into the linen, sheets were split in two, then cut in half, the text, denomination, and vignette of Britannia were printed, and finally the serial numbers were added. Forty per cent of the notes were of five-pound denomination; ten-, twenty-, and fifty-pound notes each made up another 20 per cent. On rare occasions 100-, 500-, and 1,000-pound notes were run off.

After meticulous comparison with genuine currency, the notes were divided into four classes: The best were to be used in neutral countries and taken by spies into enemy countries; the next best were to be used for paying off collaborators; the

third class was to be dumped over England, and the fourth class, made up of the worst notes, was junked.

Early attempts at distribution met with a snag. Walter Funk, Minister of Economics, forbade the operation in countries occupied by Germany lest it upset currencies he was trying to stabilize. The drop over England was postponed as other uses were found for the money. It was handy for buying up arms parachuted by the Allies to Serb, Croat, and Italian partisans. Information about the whereabouts of Mussolini's hideout, leading to his abduction from the hands of the Allies by Colonel Skorzeny, was paid for in counterfeit British notes. Phony money was the reward earned by the famous Albanian spy, Eliaza Bazna, valet to the British Ambassador to Turkey. Some of the money, to bolster the Nazi economy, was exchanged for gold in Italy and for francs in Switzerland.

The Bank of England learned of the enterprise in April, 1943, and launched countermeasures. It stopped the issue of notes of ten pounds and higher and began exchanging new ones for those already issued. The new ones had a tricky electrical safeguard—a narrow ribbon of metallic thread in the paper which conducted a particular pattern of electricity under special conditions known only to the Bank of England.

Because of complications arising on the military fronts, Operation Bernhard never reached its ultimate goal, though, thanks to Smolianoff, the counterfeits themselves were close to perfect. A total of $600,000,000 worth of British banknotes were made, $10,000,000 of which got into circulation. The effect on the Bank of England, despite the best of intentions, was troublesome but far from disastrous.

In 1944 Himmler gave Kruger a rush order to counterfeit American paper money. But time ran out before more than twenty $100 bills were finished and okayed by Himmler. The panic occasioned by Allied advances on all fronts drove the Nazis to destroy all plates and wads of spurious British money in outdoor incinerators. More bundles of notes were sunk in lakes and rivers in Austria. Kruger vanished for ten years and turned up as a storekeeper just outside of Hanover.

If there is another major conflict, it is expected that, along with the forging of passports, identity and ration cards, and military documents, the currency of enemy nations will be counterfeited on a vast scale. It is an accepted ruse of war.

Agents of the United States Secret Service, one of whose major jobs it is to nail the counterfeiter, regard him a great deal less tolerantly than the public. Apart from his effect on the monetary system, he is indirectly a recruiter of criminals. The Secret Service ranks him in the company of the kidnaper and dope peddler.

A worth-while counterfeiting operation in America today involves

various specialists. A money man lays out about three thousand (genuine) dollars for equipment—photo-engraving machinery, a single-color press, etching and routing machines. After a batch of money has been made, the money man sells it to a wholesaler for about eight cents on the dollar. The wholesaler sells it to retailers for twenty cents on the dollar. Passers buy it for thirty-five cents on the dollar.

Passers are the most vulnerable link in the entire operation. Many of them are known to police and Secret Service agents. They are the petty crooks whom shopkeepers will finger as the shover of a particular phony bill.

So the passer depends on his wife or sweetheart to do some of the work—the psychology being that a chivalrous bartender will not inspect a bill received from a lady as closely as that from a man. Should she be nabbed, if she has a clean record, she can indignantly claim that she is the dupe of some crook, and who can deny it?

But when a passer is far away from his loved ones, he must rely on strangers for help. A common procedure is for him to wander up to an idle young man with an alert look, offer him a cigarette, and chat awhile. Then, explaining he got stuck with a bogus banknote, he asks the young man—called a lobby guy in counterfeiting circles—to try to buy something with it. Should the lobby guy succeed, he is promised a great deal of change for his errand. If he gets nabbed, he is a first offender, can claim to be a dupe, and is relatively safe. But he is not so safe as the passer, who, at the first sign of suspicion on the part of the recipient of the money, darts to another corner of town. However, it is often a fine opportunity for a young man with an honest face and a charming manner to get a foothold in crime.

The paper-money creator himself, on whose skill the success of passers and their tools largely depend, has the ego, generally, of a top-flight artist. Extremely few counterfeiters are women; they are mainly small, uncommunicative men who think themselves far superior to coin counterfeiters—those shoestring operators whose margin of profit is so tiny they must do their own passing with a pocket full of change.

Whether counterfeiters are of high or low caste in the great scheme of things, they have furnished more bold, wily, and capricious oddballs than any other branch of crime.

A Russian gang in 1912 circulated half-ruble notes which were excellent reproductions of the Czar's highly inflated currency, except that on the bottom of each note was the wry message, "Our money is no worse than yours." Emanuel Ninger, a New Jerseyite who traced paper money on fine bond paper after it was soaked in coffee, was arrested when one of his fifties got wet from lying on a bar. He claimed to police that he was not legally a counterfeiter because he left the phrase "Bureau of Printing and Engraving"

off his hand-drawn notes. Marcus Crahan solved the problem of getting nabbed with the curly—always embarrassing for a counterfeiter—by pointing to an ad he repeatedly put in the paper. It said he had found a bundle of money which the owner could claim on proper identification. The Secret Service was skeptical and he eventually got fifteen years.

A Louisiana justice of the peace in 1908 set up a counterfeiting plant in a room near his court. When culprits paid fines and got change, the change they got was counterfeit. A personable Midwesterner of the nineteenth century, Thomas Peter McCartney, lectured under the name of Professor Joseph Woods. His subject was the art of detecting counterfeits. But he was prudent enough not to reveal how to distinguish the counterfeits McCartney was putting out; he talked only about his competitors. A Milanese counterfeiter of American tens made a self-conscious commentary on the quality of his merchandise when he left out the first L in the third word of the phrase, "Redeemable in Lawful Money."

Coiner Edward Berglund, who was enchanted by slot machines, fed them his own fifty-cent pieces. When he was caught, he insisted that what he was doing was legal because he had printed the word "slug" on every one of them. Forrest Starling, of Perry, Iowa, minted phony fifty-centers, using a homemade die and putting more silver into his coins than the United States Mint puts into *its* fifty-centers. Bold as brass, he passed some of them in stores in Leavenworth before a bank clerk noticed that the reeding (the grooved outer edge) was deeper than the Government's. Secret Service agents made inquiries and arrested him. When asked why he made his reeding so deep, he haughtily replied they were *his* coins and that was the way he wanted them.

Bogus-money men, in the United States at least, are growing less colorful and less successful. Since 1863, when one third of the money in circulation was counterfeit (a situation brought about because of the huge number of state and "wildcat" banks), the amount of phony money in circulation has been chopped down to an infinitesimal proportion. This has been mainly because of the work of the Secret Service, established in 1865. Of the $30,000,000-000 in circulation today, only one one thousandth of one per cent is counterfeit. In the fiscal year 1959 agents of the Service—dogged shadowers and ingratiating mixers with crooks—captured nineteen plants for the manufacture of fake paper money. The total value of money seized was $1,923,536; only $260,329 of it got into circulation. Of $6,766.32 in phony coins, $6,359.07 got into circulation, but the Secret Service does not regard the coiner as a menace.

The record for the rounding up of a counterfeiting ring and the seizure of its equipment is eight hours. A few years ago, a grocer in Pittsburgh received a phony five-

dollar bill and happened to notice that the woman who gave it to him got into a car with New Jersey plates. Remembering the license number, the grocer passed it along to Secret Service men, who checked it with authorities in Trenton. It developed that the car owner lived in Centreville. A few hours later an agent was on his way there, accompanied by a New Jersey state trooper. When they arrived at the house, the two pounded on the door but failed to wake anyone, so the agent went around back. He glimpsed a man in pajamas who was flourishing a shotgun. Busting in, the agent snatched it from him, kicked down a wall and found a set of plates, and turned the man over to the trooper.

Then he waited for the lady to return. She came in the car, along with a man. The agent blew a hole in the front tire, yanked the door open, and braked the car. It was filled with minor purchases bought with the phony money the afternoon before. Two trunks filled with counterfeit were located in the attic and two more plates were found hidden in the rafters. The three, comprising the entire gang, were taken into custody and the case was wrapped up. The Secret Service man, who had been sick, went back to bed.

There are fashions in forgery and counterfeiting just as there are in dresses and hats. Supply follows demand. Ancient Romans bought ancient Greek sculptures and coins that were forged. The Middle Ages, eschewing art, specialized in the counterfeiting of relics of saints and martyrs. During the Renaissance classical sculpture was admired; it naturally followed that it was forged. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries picture faking was the rage, while in the eighteenth, emphasis shifted to romantically inspired literary works, such as James MacPherson's "translations" of the poems of Ossian, a legendary third-century bard. Thomas Chatterton wrote a "play by Shakespeare"—*Vortigern*—which was produced in 1796 but was unfortunately howled off the stage. The golden age for antique forgery, as well as forged works of art of all types, was the nineteenth century. Expert criticism was rare and scientific detection methods were still in their infancy.

Great names have lent themselves to forgery. Michelangelo at the age of twenty-one sculpted a marble Cupid which he buried in the ground. Soon after it was exhumed and sold to a collector as an antique. Many great artists of the past had pupils copy their paintings as part of their training. A particularly good job was rewarded by the master's affixing his signature to it. Rembrandt and Corot often signed pictures on which they had painted only a few strokes. Van Dyck painted, at most, eighty canvases, but 2,000 pictures have been attributed to him. In music, as a struggling violinist, Fritz Kreisler signed other composers' names to his violin pieces so his repertory would not be drastically limited.

The beginning of the twentieth century is notable for the Lincoln forgeries of Joseph Cosey, the stamp forgeries of Jean de Sperati, and the famous Piltdown skull fraud of a highly respected English solicitor and fossil collector, Charles Dawson.

The middle of the twentieth century is notable for a fantastic rise in check forgeries and a booming new industry—the forging of trade names.

Check forging is the fastest-growing crime in America, with the amateurs outnumbering the pros. It is a problem for supermarkets, department stores, and independent grocery stores as much as banks. One fifth of check forgers are women.

One reason for its popularity is that 90 per cent of all business transactions are carried out by check. Another is that check forgers are so enchanted by the ease with which they can buy things and acquire cash that they are hard put to reform. One check forger, thrown into jail for a clumsy forgery, whiled away several years practicing his handwriting. When he came out he was a master. Another, after serving time for forgery, turned Square John, gave lectures, and became a sheriff's deputy. Then he ran wild and wrote $3,500 worth of bum checks.

An even more ambitious forger, who had arthritis so bad he could hardly write, stole mail from building lobbies and then altered the names of payees on checks he found in pilfered letters. He changed the name Apple and Co. on a check to Appleton R. Coxbetner. Then he took out a fishing license in that name, used it as identification, and the bank clerk cashed the check. He clipped banks for nearly $25,000 this way.

One method of cutting down on the practice is the use by depositors of checks especially treated so that, when ink eradicator touches them, they break out in a rash of Void-void-void. Another is the installation of cameras at tellers' cages to record photographically the face of the check casher, his check, and his means of identification. If the check casher refuses to let his picture be taken, the bank has every right to refuse to honor his check.

But equally as tempting as check forgery to make a quick buck these days is the sale of cheap, inferior products bearing the counterfeit labels of well-known brands. Almost every nationally advertised trademark has suffered abuse as a result of this new racket—Leica cameras, BVD's, Victor records, Chanel perfume, Good Humor ice cream, Revlon nail polish, Singer sewing machines, Bendix-Westinghouse air brakes, and so on.

It is estimated that half a billion dollars' worth of bogus auto parts are sold annually, all bearing the names of respectable firms. When the parts break down or fail to work, it's the company whose label is on the products that loses a customer and may gain a lawsuit.

At Christmastime a few years ago

Chicago was flooded with 200,000 watches purporting to be Bulovas. "Bulov" was printed on the dial face and the number seventeen appeared beneath the name. The seventeen was interpreted to mean the number of jewels in the works, but each watch was sixteen short. The watches were worth three dollars and sold for twenty-six.

Naturally the manufacturers of honest merchandise who have spent years earning reputations for integrity, and millions on acquainting the public with the superiority of their products, are not too pleased when their trademark is swiped and affixed to crumbling goods. They sell fewer products because of the competition and they lose good will when customers find themselves stung with a shoddy product under a nationally known label.

Some companies have gotten injunctions against the offenders, but the profits are so huge that the culprits merely laughed at the court orders. Getting evidence against brand-name counterfeiters that will stand up in court is highly expensive, time-consuming, and difficult, entailing the hiring of an army of private investigators. In addition, state laws about the practice are extremely hazy, and there is no federal law declaring that this type of forgery is a crime, unless misrepresented goods are sold through the mails.

The Bulova Watch Company, thoroughly aroused, spent bushels of money to break up the Chicago watch-counterfeiting ring. When the trial was over, the ringleader got ten days in jail and his confederates got suspended sentences. Bad perfume comes in good bottles, untrustworthy brakes are put into autos, and people buy burned-out TV tubes. They are all counterfeit, and not much can be done about it.

It kind of makes you long for the days of good old King Canute.

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P.D.

AN 87th PRECINCT NOVEL BY

ED McBAIN

87

THE EMPTY HOURS

The city in these pages is imaginary. The people, the places are all fictitious. Only the police routine is based on established investigatory technique.

THEY THOUGHT SHE WAS COLORED AT first.

The patrolman who investigated the complaint didn't expect to find a dead woman. This was the first time he'd seen a corpse, and he was somewhat shaken by the ludicrously relaxed grotesqueness of the girl lying on her back on the rug, and his hand trembled a little as he made out his report. But when he came to the blank line calling for an identification of RACE, he unhesitatingly wrote "Negro."

The call had been taken at Headquarters by a patrolman in the central Complaint Bureau. He sat at a desk with a pad of printed forms before him, and he copied down the information, shrugged because this seemed like a routine squeal, rolled the form and slipped it into a metal carrier, and then shot it by pneumatic tube to the radio room. A dispatcher there read the complaint form, shrugged because this seemed like a routine squeal, studied the precinct map on the wall opposite his desk, and then dispatched car eleven of the 87th Precinct to the scene.

The girl was dead.

She may have been a pretty girl, but she was hideous in death, distorted by the expanding gases inside her skin case. She was wearing a sweater and skirt, and she was barefoot, and her skirt had pulled back when she fell to the rug. Her head was twisted at a curious angle, the short black hair cradled by the rug, her eyes open and brown in a bloated face. The patrolman felt a sudden impulse to pull the girl's skirt down over her knees. He knew, suddenly, she would have wanted this. Death had caught her in this indecent posture, robbing her of female instinct. There were things this girl would never do again, so many things, all of which must have seemed enormously important to the girl herself. But the single universal thing was an infinitesimal detail, magnified now by death: she would never again perform the simple feminine and somehow beautiful act of pulling her skirt down over her knees.

The patrolman sighed and finished his report. The image of the dead girl remained in his mind all the way down to the squad car.

It was hot in the squadroom on that night in early August. The men working the graveyard shift had reported for duty at 6:00 P.M., and they would not go home until eight the following morning. They were all detectives and perhaps privileged members of the police force, but there were many policemen—Detective Meyer Meyer among them—who maintained that a uniformed cop's life made a hell of a lot more sense than a detective's.

"Sure, it does," Meyer insisted now, sitting at his desk in his shirt sleeves. "A patrolman's schedule provides regularity and security. It gives a man a home life."

"This squadroom is your home, Meyer," Carella said. "Admit it."

"Sure," Meyer answered, grinning. "I can't wait to come to work each day." He passed a hand over his bald pate. "You know what I like especially about this place? The interior decoration. The décor. It's very restful."

"Oh, you don't like your fellow workers, huh?" Carella said. He slid off the desk and winked at Cotton Hawes who was standing at one of the filing cabinets. Then he walked toward the water cooler at the other end of the room, just inside the slatted railing that divided squadroom from corridor. He moved with a nonchalant ease that was deceptive. Steve Carella had never been one of those weight-lifting goons, and the image he presented was hardly one of bulging muscular power. But there was a quiet strength about the man and the way he moved, a confidence in the way he casually accepted the capabilities and limitations of his body. He stopped at the water cooler, filled a paper cup, and turned to look at Meyer again.

"No, I like my colleagues," Meyer said. "In fact, Steve, if I had my choice in all the world of who to work with, I would choose you honorable, decent guys. Sure." Meyer nodded, building steam. "In fact, I'm thinking of having some medals cast off, so I can hand them out to you guys. Boy, am I lucky to have this job! I may come to work without pay from now on. I may just refuse my salary, this job is so enriching. I want to thank you guys. You make me recognize the real values in life."

"He makes a nice speech," Hawes said.

"He should run the line-up. It would break the monotony. How come you don't run the line-up, Meyer?"

"Steve, I been offered the job," Meyer said seriously. "I told them I'm needed right here at the Eighty-seventh, the garden spot of all the precincts. Why, they offered me chief of detectives, and when I said no, they offered me commissioner, but I was loyal to the squad."

"Let's give *him* a medal," Hawes said, and the telephone rang.

Meyer lifted the receiver. "Eighty-seventh Squad, Detective Meyer. What? Yeah, just a second." He pulled a pad into place and began writing. "Yeah, I got it. Right. Right. Right. Okay." He hung up. Carella had walked to his desk. "A little colored girl," Meyer said.

"Yeah?"

"In a furnished room on South Eleventh."

"Yeah?"

"Dead," Meyer said.

2.

The city doesn't seem to be itself in the very early hours of the morning.

She is a woman, of course, and time will never change that. She awakes as a woman, tentatively touching the day in a yawning, smiling stretch, her lips free of color,

her hair tousled, warm from sleep, her body richer, an innocent girlish quality about her as sunlight stains the eastern sky and covers her with early heat. She dresses in furnished rooms in crumby rundown slums, and she dresses in Hall Avenue penthouses, and in the countless apartments that crowd the buildings of Isola and Riverhead and Calm's Point, in the private houses that line the streets of Bethtown and Majesta, and she emerges a different woman, sleek and businesslike, attractive but not sexy, a look of utter competence about her, manicured and polished, but with no time for nonsense, there is a long working day ahead of her. At five o'clock a metamorphosis takes place. She does not change her costume, this city, this woman, she wears the same frock or the same suit, the same high-heeled pumps or the same suburban loafers, but something breaks through that immaculate shell, a mood, a tone, an undercurrent. She is a different woman who sits in the bars and cocktail lounges, who relaxes on the patios or on the terraces shelving the skyscrapers, a different woman with a somewhat lazily inviting grin, a somewhat tired expression, an impenetrable knowledge on her face and in her eyes: she lifts her glass, she laughs gently, the evening sits expectantly on the skyline, the sky is awash with the purple of day's end.

She turns female in the night.

She drops her femininity and turns female. The polish is gone, the mechanized competence; she becomes a little scatterbrained and a little cuddly; she crosses her legs recklessly and allows her lipstick to be kissed clear off her mouth, and she responds to the male hands on her body, and she turns soft and inviting and miraculously primitive. The night is a female time, and the city is nothing but a woman.

And in the empty hours she sleeps, and she does not seem to be herself.

In the morning she will awake again and touch the silent air in a yawn, spreading her arms, the contented smile on her naked mouth. Her hair will be mussed, we will know her, we have seen her this way often.

But now she sleeps. She sleeps silently, this city. Oh, an eye open in the buildings of the night here and there, winking on, off again, silence. She rests. In sleep we do not recognize her. Her sleep is not like death, for we can hear and sense the murmur of life beneath the warm bedclothes. But she is a strange woman whom we have known intimately, loved passionately, and now she curls into an unresponsive ball beneath the sheet, and our hand is on her rich hip. We can feel life there, but we do not know her. She is faceless and featureless in the dark. She could be any city, any woman, anywhere. We touch her uncertainly. She has pulled the black nightgown of early morning around her, and we do not know her. She is a stranger, and her eyes are closed.

The landlady was frightened by the presence of policemen, even

though she had summoned them. The taller one, the one who called himself Detective Hawes, was a red-headed giant with a white streak in his hair, a horror if she'd ever seen one. The landlady stood in the apartment where the girl lay dead on the rug, and she talked to the detectives in whispers, not because she was in the presence of death, but only because it was three o'clock in the morning. The landlady was wearing a bathrobe over her gown. There was an intimacy to the scene, the same intimacy that hangs alike over an impending fishing trip or a completed tragedy. Three A.M. is a time for slumber, and those who are awake while the city sleeps share a common bond that makes them friendly aliens.

"What's the girl's name?" Carella asked. It was three o'clock in the morning, and he had not shaved since five P.M. the day before, but his chin looked smooth. His eyes slanted slightly downward, combining with his clean-shaven face to give him a curiously oriental appearance. The landlady liked him. He was a nice boy, she thought. In her lexicon the men of the world were either "nice boys" or "louses." She wasn't sure about Cotton Hawes yet, but she imagined he was a parasitic insect.

"Claudia Davis," she answered, directing the answer to Carella whom she liked, and totally ignoring Hawes who had no right to be so big a man with a frightening white streak in his hair.

"Do you know how old she was?" Carella asked.

"Twenty-eight or twenty-nine, I think."

"Had she been living here long?"

"Since June," the landlady said.

"That short a time, huh?"

"And *this* has to happen," the landlady said. "She seemed like such a nice girl. Who do you suppose did it?"

"I don't know," Carella said.

"Or do you think it was suicide? I don't smell no gas, do you?"

"No," Carella said. "Do you know where she lived before this, Mrs. Mauder?"

"No, I don't."

"You didn't ask for references when she took the apartment?"

"It's only a furnished room," Mrs. Mauder said, shrugging. "She paid me a month's rent in advance."

"How much was that, Mrs. Mauder?"

"Sixty dollars. She paid it in cash. I never take checks from strangers."

"But you have no idea whether she's from this city, or out of town, or whatever. Am I right?"

"Yes, that's right."

"Davis," Hawes said, shaking his head. "That'll be a tough name to track down, Steve. Must be a thousand of them in the phone book."

"Why is your hair white?" the landlady asked.

"Huh?"

"That streak."

"Oh." Hawes unconsciously touched his left temple. "I got knifed once," he said, dismissing the question abruptly. "Mrs. Mauder, was the girl living alone?"

"I don't know. I mind my own business."

"Well, surely you would have seen . . ."

"I think she was living alone. I don't pry, and I don't spy. She gave me a month's rent in advance."

Hawes sighed. He could feel the woman's hostility. He decided to leave the questioning to Carella. "I'll take a look through the drawers and closets," he said, and moved off without waiting for Carella's answer.

"It's awfully hot in here," Carella said.

"The patrolman said we shouldn't touch anything until you got here," Mrs. Mauder said. "That's why I didn't open the windows or nothing."

"That was very thoughtful of you," Carella said, smiling. "But I think we can open the window now, don't you?"

"If you like. It does smell in here. Is . . . is that her? Smelling?"

"Yes," Carella answered. He pulled open the window. "There. That's a little better."

"Doesn't help much," the landlady said. "The weather's been terrible—just terrible. Body can't sleep at all." She looked down at the dead girl. "She looks just awful, don't she?"

"Yes. Mrs. Mauder, would you know where she worked, or if she had a job?"

"No, I'm sorry."

"Anyone ever come by asking for her? Friends? Relatives?"

"No, I'm sorry. I never saw any."

"Can you tell me anything about her habits? When she left the house in the morning? When she returned at night?"

"I'm sorry; I never noticed."

"Well, what made you think something was wrong in here?"

"The milk. Outside the door. I was out with some friends tonight, you see, and when I came back a man on the third floor called down to say his neighbor was playing the radio very loud and would I tell him to shut up, please. So I went upstairs and asked him to turn down the radio, and then I passed Miss Davis' apartment and saw the milk standing outside the door, and I thought this was kind of funny in such hot weather, to leave the milk standing outside, but I figured it was *her* milk, you know, and I don't like to pry. So I came down and went to bed, but I couldn't stop thinking about that milk standing outside in the hallway. So I put on a robe and came upstairs and knocked on the door, and she didn't answer. So I called out to her, and she still didn't answer. So I figured something must be wrong. I don't know why. I just figured . . . I don't know. If she was in here, why didn't she answer?"

"How'd you know she was here?"

"I didn't."

"Was the door locked?"

"Yes."

"You tried it?"

"Yes. It was locked."

"I see," Carella said.

"Couple of cars just pulled up downstairs," Hawes said, walking over. "Probably the lab. And Homicide South."

"They know the squeal is ours," Carella said. "Why do they bother?"

"Make it look good," Hawes said. "Homicide's got the title on the door, so they figure they ought to go out and earn their salaries."

"Did you find anything?"

"A brand-new set of luggage in the closet, six pieces. The drawers and closets are full of clothes. Most of them look new. Lots of resort stuff, Steve. Found some brand-new books, too."

"What else?"

"Some mail on the dresser top."

"Anything we can use?"

Hawes shrugged. "A statement from the girl's bank. Bunch of canceled checks. Might help us."

"Maybe," Carella said. "Let's see what the lab comes up with."

The laboratory report came the next day, together with a necropsy report from the assistant medical examiner. In combination, the reports were fairly valuable. The first thing the detectives learned was that the girl was a white Caucasian of approximately thirty years of age.

Yes, white.

The news came as something of a surprise to the cops because the girl lying on the rug had certainly looked like a Negress. After all, her skin was black. Not tan, not coffee-colored, not brown, but black—that intensely black coloration found on primitive tribes who spend a good deal of their time in the sun. The conclusion seemed to be a logical one, but death is a great equalizer not without a whimsical humor all its own, and the funniest kind of joke is a sight gag. Death changes white to black, and when that grisly old man comes marching in there's no question of who's going to school with whom. There's no longer any question of pigmentation, friend. That girl on the floor looked black, but she was white, and whatever else she was she was also stone cold dead, and that's the worst you can do to anybody.

The report explained that the girl's body was in a state of advanced putrefaction, and it went into such esoteric terms as "general distention of the body cavities, tissues, and blood vessels with gas," and "black discoloration of the skin, mucous membranes, and irides caused by hemolysis and action of hydrogen sulfide on the blood pigment," all of which broke down to the simple fact that it was a damn hot week in August and the girl had been lying on a rug which retained heat and speeded the post-mortem putrefaction. From what they could tell, and in weather like this, it was mostly a guess, the girl had been dead and decomposing for at least forty-eight hours, which set the time of her demise as August first or thereabouts.

One of the reports went on to say that the clothes she'd been wearing had been purchased in one of the city's larger department stores. All of her clothes—those she wore and those found in her apartment—were rather expensive, but someone at the lab thought it necessary to note that her panties were trimmed with Bel-

gian lace and retailed for twenty-five dollars a pair. Someone else at the lab mentioned that a thorough examination of her garments and her body had revealed no traces of blood, semen, or oil stains.

The coroner fixed the cause of death as strangulation.

3.

It is amazing how much an apartment can sometimes yield to science. It is equally amazing, and more than a little disappointing, to get nothing from the scene of a murder when you are desperately seeking a clue. The furnished room in which Claudia Davis had been strangled to death was full of juicy surfaces conceivably carrying hundreds of latent fingerprints. The closets and drawers contained piles of clothing that might have carried traces of anything from gunpowder to face powder. Nor was it impossible in this scientific age of wonders to lift fingerprint impressions from the naked skin, and so there was the hope that the strangler had left some trace of himself on the throat of his victim.

But the lab boys went around lifting their prints and sifting their dust and vacuuming with a Söderman-Heuberger filter, and they went down to the morgue and studied the girl's skin and came up with a total of nothing. Zero. Oh, not quite zero. They got a lot of prints belonging to Claudia Davis, and a lot of dust collected from all over the city and clinging to her shoes and her furniture. They also found some documents belonging to the dead girl—a birth certificate, a diploma of graduation from a high school in Santa Monica, and an expired library card. And, oh, yes, a key. The key didn't seem to fit any of the locks in the room. They sent all the junk over to the 87th, and Sam Grossman called Carella personally later that day to apologize for the lack of results.

The squadroom was hot and noisy when Carella took the call from the lab. The conversation was a curiously one-sided affair. Carella, who had dumped the contents of the laboratory envelope onto his desk, merely grunted or nodded every now and then. He thanked Grossman at last, hung up, and stared at the window facing the street and Grover Park.

"Get anything?" Meyer asked.

"Yeah. Grossman thinks the killer was wearing gloves."

"That's nice," Meyer said.

"Also, I think I know what this key is for." He lifted it from the desk.

"Yeah? What?"

"Well, did you see these canceled checks?"

"No."

"Take a look," Carella said.

He opened the brown bank envelope addressed to Claudia Davis, spread the canceled checks on his desk top, and then unfolded the yellow bank statement. Meyer studied the display silently.

"Cotton found the envelope in her room," Carella said. "The statement covers the month of July. Those are all the checks she wrote, or at least

everything that cleared the bank by the thirty-first."

"Lots of checks here," Meyer said.

"Twenty-five, to be exact. What do you think?"

"What am I supposed to think?"

"I know what *I* think," Carella said.

"What's that?"

"I look at those checks, I can see a life. It's like reading somebody's diary. Everything she did last month is right here, Meyer. All the department stores she went to, look, a florist, her hairdresser, a candy shop, even her shoemaker, and look at this. A check made out to a funeral home. Now who died, Meyer, huh? And look here. She was living at Mrs. Mauder's place, but here's a check made out to a swank apartment building on the South Side, in Stewart City. And some of these checks are just made out to names, *people*. This case is crying for some people."

"You want me to get the phone book?"

"No, wait a minute. Look at this bank statement. She opened the account on July fifth with a thousand bucks. All of a sudden, bam, she deposits a thousand bucks in the Seaboard Bank of America."

"What's so odd about that?"

"Nothing, maybe. But Cotton called the other banks in the city, and Claudia Davis has a very healthy account at the Highland Trust on Cromwell Avenue. And I mean *very* healthy."

"How healthy?"

"Close to sixty grand."

"What!"

"You heard me. And the Highland Trust lists no withdrawals for the month of July. So where'd she get the money to put into Seaboard?"

"Was that the only deposit?"

"Take a look."

Meyer picked up the statement.

"The initial deposit was on July fifth," Carella said. "A thousand bucks. She made another thousand-dollar deposit on July twelfth. And another on the nineteenth. And another on the twenty-seventh."

Meyer raised his eyebrows. "Four grand. That's a lot of loot."

"And all deposited in less than a month's time. I've got to work almost a full year to make that kind of money."

"Not to mention the sixty grand in the other bank. Where do you suppose she got it, Steve?"

"I don't know. It just doesn't make sense. She wears underpants trimmed with Belgian lace, but she lives in a crumby room-and-a-half with bath. How the hell do you figure that? Two bank accounts, twenty-five bucks to cover her ass, and all she pays is sixty bucks a month for a flophouse."

"Maybe she's hot, Steve."

"No." Carella shook his head. "I ran a make with C.B.I. She hasn't got a record, and she's not wanted for anything. I haven't heard from the feds yet, but I imagine it'll be the same story."

"What about that key? You said . . ."

"Oh, yeah. That's pretty simple, thank God. Look at this."

He reached into the pile of checks and sorted out a yellow slip, larger than the checks. He handed it to Meyer. The slip read:

THE SEABOARD BANK OF AMERICA

Isola Branch P 1698

July 5 19 60

We are charging your account as per items below. Please see that the amount is deducted on your books so that our accounts may agree.

FOR Safe deposit rental #375		5	00
U.S. Tax			50
AMOUNT OF CHARGE		5	50

CHARGE Claudia Davis
1263 South Eleventh
Isola

ENTERED BY BPR

"She rented a safe-deposit box the same day she opened the new checking account, huh?" Meyer said.

"Right."

"What's in it?"

"That's a good question."

"Look, do you want to save some time, Steve?"

"Sure."

"Let's get the court order *before* we go to the bank."

4.

The manager of the Seaboard Bank of America was a bald-headed man in his early fifties. Working on the theory that similar physical types are *simpático,* Carella allowed Meyer to do most of the questioning. It was not easy to elicit answers from Mr. Anderson, the manager of the bank, because he was by nature a reticent man. But Detective Meyer Meyer was the most patient man in the city, if not the entire world. His patience was an acquired trait, rather than an inherited one. Oh, he had inherited a few things from his father, a jovial man named Max Meyer, but patience was not one of them. If anything, Max Meyer had been a very impatient if not downright short-tempered sort of fellow. When his wife, for example, came to him with the news that she was expecting a baby, Max nearly hit the ceiling. He enjoyed little jokes immensely, was perhaps

the biggest practical joker in all Riverhead, but this particular prank of nature failed to amuse him. He had thought his wife was long past the age when bearing children was even a remote possibility. He never thought of himself as approaching dotage, but he was after all getting on in years, and a change-of-life baby was hardly what the doctor had ordered. He allowed the impending birth to simmer inside him, planning his revenge all the while, plotting the practical joke to end all practical jokes.

When the baby was born, he named it Meyer, a delightful handle which when coupled with the family name provided the infant with a double-barreled monicker: Meyer Meyer.

Now that's pretty funny. Admit it. You can split your sides laughing over that one, unless you happen to be a pretty sensitive kid who also happens to be an Orthodox Jew, and who happens to live in a predominately Gentile neighborhood. The kids in the neighborhood thought Meyer Meyer had been invented solely for their own pleasure. If they needed further provocation for beating up the Jew boy, and they didn't need any, his name provided excellent motivational fuel. "Meyer Meyer, Jew on fire!" they would shout, and then they would chase him down the street and beat hell out of him.

Meyer learned patience. It is not very often that one kid, or even one grown man, can successfully defend himself against a gang. But sometimes you can talk yourself out of a beating. Sometimes, if you're patient, if you just wait long enough, you can catch one of them alone and stand up to him face to face, man to man, and know the exultation of a fair fight without the frustration of overwhelming odds.

Listen, Max Meyer's joke was a harmless one. You can't deny an old man his pleasure. But Mr. Anderson, the manager of the bank, was fifty-four years old and totally bald. Meyer Meyer, the detective second grade who sat opposite him and asked questions, was also totally bald. Maybe a lifetime of sublimation, a lifetime of devoted patience, doesn't leave any scars. Maybe not. But Meyer Meyer was only thirty-seven years old.

Patiently he said, "Didn't you find these large deposits rather odd, Mr. Anderson?"

"No," Anderson said. "A thousand dollars is not a lot of money."

"Mr. Anderson," Meyer said patiently, "you are aware, of course, that banks in this city are required to report to the police any unusually large sums of money deposited at one time. You are aware of that, are you not?"

"Yes, I am."

"Miss Davis deposited four thousand dollars in three weeks' time. Didn't that seem unusual to you?"

"No. The deposits were spaced. A thousand dollars is not a lot of money, and not an unusually large deposit."

"To me," Meyer said, "a thousand dollars is a lot of money. You can buy a lot of beer with a thousand dollars."

"I don't drink beer," Anderson said flatly.

"Neither do I," Meyer answered.

"Besides, we *do* call the police whenever we get a very large deposit, unless the depositor is one of our regular customers. I did not feel these deposits warranted such a call."

"Thank you, Mr. Anderson," Meyer said. "We have a court order here. We'd like to open the box Miss Davis rented."

"May I see the order, please?" Anderson said. Meyer showed it to him. Anderson sighed and said, "Very well. Do you have Miss Davis' key?"

Carella reached into his pocket. "Would this be it?" he said. He put a key on the desk. It was the key that had come to him from the lab together with the documents they'd found in the apartment.

"Yes, that's it," Mr. Anderson said. "There are two different keys to every box, you see. The bank keeps one, and the renter keeps the other. The box cannot be opened without both keys. Will you come with me, please?"

He collected the bank key to safety-deposit box number 375 and led the detectives to the rear of the bank. The room seemed to be lined with shining metal. The boxes, row upon row, reminded Carella of the morgue and the refrigerated shelves that slid in and out of the wall on squeaking rollers. Anderson pushed the bank key into a slot and turned it, and then he put Claudia Davis' key into a second slot and turned that. He pulled the long, thin box out of the wall and handed it to Meyer. Meyer carried it to the counter on the opposite wall and lifted the catch.

"Okay?" he said to Carella.

"Go ahead."

Meyer raised the lid of the box.

There was $16,000 in the box. There was also a slip of note paper. The $16,000 was neatly divided into four stacks of bills. Three of the stacks held $5,000 each. The fourth stack held only $1,000. Carella picked up the slip of paper. Someone, presumably Claudia Davis, had made some annotations on it in pencil.

7/5 20,000
7/5 -1,000
19,000
7/12 -1,000
18,000
7/19 -1,000
17,000
7/27 -1,000
16,000

"Make any sense to you, Mr. Anderson?"

"No. I'm afraid not."

"She came into this bank on July fifth with twenty thousand dollars in cash, Mr. Anderson. She put a thousand of that into a checking account and the remainder into this box. The dates on this slip of paper show exactly when she took cash from the

box and transferred it to the checking account. She knew the rules, Mr. Anderson. She knew that twenty grand deposited in one lump would bring a call to the police. This way was a lot safer."

"We'd better get a list of these serial numbers," Meyer said.

"Would you have one of your people do that for us, Mr. Anderson?"

Anderson seemed ready to protest. Instead, he looked at Carella, sighed, and said, "Of course."

The serial numbers didn't help them at all. They compared them against their own lists, and the out-of-town lists, and the FBI lists, but none of those bills was hot.

Only August was.

5.

Stewart City hangs in the hair of Isola like a jeweled tiara. Not really a city, not even a town, merely a collection of swank apartment buildings overlooking the River Dix, the community had been named after British royalty and remained one of the most exclusive neighborhoods in town. If you could boast of a Stewart City address, you could also boast of a high income, a country place on Sands Spit, and a Mercedes Benz in the garage under the apartment building. You could give your address with a measure of snobbery and pride—you were, after all, one of the elite.

The dead girl named Claudia Davis had made out a check to Management Enterprises, Inc., at 13 Stewart Place South, to the tune of $750. The check had been dated July ninth, four days after she'd opened the Seaboard account.

A cool breeze was blowing in off the river as Carella and Hawes pulled up. Late-afternoon sunlight dappled the polluted water of the Dix. The bridges connecting Calm's Point with Isola hung against a sky awaiting the assault of dusk.

"Want to pull down the sun visor?" Carella said.

Hawes reached up and turned down the visor. Clipped to the visor so that it showed through the windshield of the car was a hand-lettered card that read POLICEMAN ON DUTY CALL—87TH PRECINCT. The car, a 1956 Chevrolet, was Carella's own.

"I've got to make a sign for my car," Hawes said. "Some bastard tagged it last week."

"What did you do?"

"I went to court and pleaded not guilty. On my day off."

"Did you get out of it?"

"Sure. I was answering a squeal. It's bad enough I had to use my own car, but for Pete's sake, to get a ticket!"

"I prefer my own car," Carella said. "Those three cars belonging to the squad are ready for the junk heap."

"Two," Hawes corrected. "One of them's been in the police garage for a month now."

"Meyer went down to see about it the other day."

"What'd they say? Was it ready?"

"No, the mechanic told him there were four patrol cars ahead of the

sedan, and they took precedence. Now how about that?"

"Sure, it figures. I've still got a chit in for the gas I used, you know that?"

"Forget it. I've never got back a cent I laid out for gas."

"What'd Meyer do about the car?"

"He slipped the mechanic five bucks. Maybe that'll speed him up."

"You know what the city ought to do?" Hawes said. "They ought to buy some of those used taxicabs. Pick them up for two or three hundred bucks, paint them over, and give them out to the squads. Some of them are still in pretty good condition."

"Well, it's an idea," Carella said dubiously, and they entered the building. They found Mrs. Miller, the manager, in an office at the rear of the ornate entrance lobby. She was a woman in her early forties with a well-preserved figure and a very husky voice. She wore her hair piled on the top of her head, a pencil stuck rakishly into the reddish-brown heap. She looked at the photostated check and said, "Oh, yes, of course."

"You knew Miss Davis?"

"Yes, she lived here for a long time."

"How long?"

"Five years."

"When did she move out?"

"At the end of June." Mrs. Miller crossed her splendid legs and smiled graciously. The legs were remarkable for a woman of her age, and the smile was almost radiant. She moved with an expert femininity, a calculated unconscious fluidity of flesh that suggested availability and yet was totally respectable. She seemed to have devoted a lifetime to learning the ways and wiles of the female and now practiced them with facility and charm. She was pleasant to be with, this woman, pleasant to watch and to hear, and to think of touching. Carella and Hawes, charmed to their shoes, found themselves relaxing in her presence.

"This check," Carella said, tapping the photostat. "What was it for?"

"June's rent. I received it on the tenth of July. Claudia always paid her rent by the tenth of the month. She was a very good tenant."

"The apartment cost seven hundred and fifty dollars a month?"

"Yes."

"Isn't that high for an apartment?"

"Not in Stewart City," Mrs. Miller said gently. "And this was a river-front apartment."

"I see. I take it Miss Davis had a good job."

"No, no, she doesn't have a job at all."

"Then how could she afford . . . ?"

"Well, she's rather well off, you know."

"Where does she get the money, Mrs. Miller?"

"Well . . ." Mrs. Miller shrugged. "I really think you should ask *her*, don't you? I mean, if this is something concerning Claudia, shouldn't you . . . ?"

"Mrs. Miller," Carella said, "Claudia Davis is dead."

"What?"

"She's . . ."

"What? No. No." She shook her

head. "Claudia? But the check . . . I . . . the check came only last month." She shook her head again. "No. No."

"She's dead, Mrs. Miller," Carella said gently. "She was strangled."

The charm faltered for just an instant. Revulsion knifed the eyes of Mrs. Miller, the eyelids flickered, it seemed for an instant that the pupils would turn shining and wet, that the carefully lipsticked mouth would crumble. And then something inside took over, something that demanded control, something that reminded her that a charming woman does not weep and cause her fashionable eye make-up to run.

"I'm sorry," she said, almost in a whisper. "I am really, really sorry. She was a nice person."

"Can you tell us what you know about her, Mrs. Miller?"

"Yes. Yes, of course." she shook her head again, unwilling to accept the idea. "That's terrible. That's terrible. Why, she was only a baby."

"We figured her for thirty, Mrs. Miller. Are we wrong?"

"She seemed younger, but perhaps that was because . . . Well, she was a rather shy person. Even when she first came here, there was an air of—well, lostness about her. Of course, that was right after her parents died, so . . ."

"Where did she come from, Mrs. Miller?"

"California. Santa Monica."

Carella nodded. "You were starting to tell us . . . you said she was rather well off. Could you . . . ?"

"Well, the stock, you know."

"What stock?"

"Her parents had set up a securities trust account for her. When they died, Claudia began receiving the income from the stock. She was an only child, you know."

"And she lived on stock dividends alone?"

"They amounted to quite a bit. Which she saved, I might add. She was a very systematic person, not at all frivolous. When she received a dividend check, she would endorse it and take it straight to the bank. Claudia was a very sensible girl."

"Which bank, Mrs. Miller?"

"The Highland Trust. Right down the street. On Cromwell Avenue."

"I see," Carella said. "Was she dating many men? Would you know?"

"I don't think so. She kept pretty much to herself. Even after Josie came."

Carella leaned forward. "Josie? Who's Josie?"

"Josie Thompson. Josephine, actually. Her cousin."

"And where did *she* come from?"

"California. They both came from California."

"And how can we get in touch with this Josie Thompson?"

"Well, she . . . Don't you know? Haven't you . . . ?"

"What, Mrs. Miller?"

"Why, Josie is dead. Josie passed on in June. That's why Claudia moved, I suppose. I suppose she couldn't bear the thought of living in that apartment without Josie. It *is* a little frightening, isn't it?

"Yes," said Carella.

DETECTIVE DIVISION SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT	SQUAD	PRECINCT	PRECINCT REPORT	DETECTIVE DIVISION REPORT NUMBER
pdcn 360 rev 25m	87	87	32-101	DD 60 R-42

NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON REPORTING					DATE ORIGINAL REPORT
Miller	Irene (Mrs. John)		13 Stewart Place S.		8-4-60
SURNAME	GIVEN NAME	INITIALS	NUMBER	STREET	

DETAILS

Summary of interview with Irene (Mrs. John) Miller at office of Management Enterprises, Inc., address above, in re homicide Claudia Davis. Mrs. Miller states:

Claudia Davis came to this city in June of 1955, took $750-a-month apartment above address, lived there alone. Rarely seen in company of friends, male or female. Young recluse type living on substantial income of inherited securities. Parents, Mr. and Mrs. Carter Davis, killed on San Diego Freeway in head-on collision with station wagon, April 14, 1955. L.A.P.D. confirms traffic accident, driver of other vehicle convicted for negligent operation. Mrs. Miller describes girl as medium height and weight, close-cropped brunette hair, brown eyes, no scars or birthmarks she can remember, tallies with what we have on corpse. Further says Claudia Davis was quiet, unobtrusive tenant, paid rent and all service bills punctually, was gentle, sweet, plain, childlike, shy, meticulous in money matters, well liked but unapproachable.

In April or May of last year, 1959, Josie Thompson, cousin of deceased, arrived from Brentwood, California. (Routine check with

Criminal Bureau Identification negative, no record. Checking now with L.A.P.D. and FBI. Described as slightly older than Claudia, rather different in looks and personality. "They were like black and white," Mrs. Miller says, "but they hit it off exceptionally well." Josie moved into the apartment with cousin. Words used to describe relationship between two were "like the closest sisters," and "really in tune," and "the best of friends," etc. Girls did not date much, were constantly in each other's company, Josie seeming to pick up recluse habits from Claudia. Went on frequent trips together. Spent summer of '59 on Tortoise Island in the bay, returned Labor Day. Went away again at Christmas time to ski Sun Valley, and again in March this year to Kingston, Jamaica, for three weeks, returning at beginning of April. Source of income was fairly standard securities-income account. Claudia did not own the stock, but income on it was hers for as long as she lived. Trust specified that upon her death the stock and the income be turned over to U.C.L.A. (father's alma mater). In any case, Claudia was assured of a very, very substantial lifetime income (see Highland Trust bank account) and was apparently supporting Josie as well, since Mrs. Miller claims neither girl worked. Brought up question of possible lesbianism, but Mrs. Miller, who is knowledgeable and hip, says no, neither girl was a dike.

On June 3, 1960, Josie and Claudia left for another weekend trip. Doorman reports having helped them pack valises into trunk of Claudia's car, 1960 Cadillac convertible. Claudia did the driving. Girls did not return on Monday morning as they had indicated they would. Claudia called on Wednesday, crying on telephone. Told Mrs. Miller that Josie had had a terrible accident and was dead. Mrs. Miller remembers asking Claudia if she could help in any way. Claudia said, quote, No, everything's been taken care of already, unquote.

On June 17, 1960, Mrs. Miller received a letter from Claudia (letter attached—handwriting compares positive with checks Claudia signed) stating she could not possibly return to apartment, not after what had happened to her cousin. She reminded Mrs. Miller lease expired on July 4, told her she would send check for June's rent before July 10. Said moving company would pack and pick up her belongings, delivering all valuables and documents to her, and storing rest. (See Claudia Davis' check number 010, 7/14/60, made payable to Allora Brothers, Inc., "in payment for packing, moving, and storage.") Claudia Davis never returned to the apartment. Mrs. Miller had not seen her and knew nothing of her whereabouts until we informed her of the homicide.

6.

The drive upstate to Triangle Lake was a particularly scenic one, and since it was August, and since Sunday was supposed to be Carella's day off, he thought he might just as well combine a little business with pleasure. So he put the top of the car down, and he packed Teddy into the front seat together with a picnic lunch and a gallon Thermos of iced coffee, and he forgot all about Claudia Davis on the drive up through the mountains. Carella found it easy to forget about almost anything when he was with his wife.

Teddy as far as he was concerned —and his astute judgment had been backed up by many a street-corner whistle—was only the most beautiful woman in the world. He could never understand how he, a hairy, corny, ugly, stupid, clumsy cop, had managed to capture anyone as wonderful as Theodora Franklin. But capture her he had, and he sat beside her now in the open car and stole sidelong glances at her as he drove, excited as always by her very presence.

Her black hair, always wild, seemed to capture something of the wind's frenzy as it whipped about the oval of her face. Her brown eyes were partially squinted against the rush of air over the windshield. She wore a white blouse emphatically curved over a full bosom, black tapered slacks form fitted over generous hips and good legs. She had kicked off her sandals and folded her knees against her breasts, her bare feet pressed against the glove-compartment panel. There was about her, Carella realized, a curious combination of savage and sophisticate. You never knew whether she was going to kiss you or slug you, and the uncertainty kept her eternally desirable and exciting.

Teddy watched her husband as he drove, his big-knuckled hands on the wheel of the car. She watched him not only because it gave her pleasure to watch him, but also because he was speaking. And since she could not hear, since she had been born a deaf mute, it was essential that she look at his mouth when he spoke. He did not discuss the case at all. She knew that one of the Claudia Davis checks had been made out to the Fancher Funeral Home in Triangle Lake and she knew that Carella wanted to talk to the proprietor of the place personally. She further knew that this was very important or he wouldn't be spending his Sunday driving all the way upstate. But he had promised her he'd combine business with pleasure. This was the pleasure part of the trip, and in deference to his promise and his wife, he refrained from discussing the case, which was really foremost in his mind. He talked, instead, about the scenery, and their plans for the fall, and the way the twins were growing, and how pretty Teddy looked, and how she'd better button that top button of her blouse before they got out of the car, but he never once mentioned Claudia Davis until they were standing in the office of the Fancher Funeral Home and look-

ing into the gloomy eyes of a man who called himself Barton Scoles.

Scoles was tall and thin and he wore a black suit that he had probably worn to his own confirmation back in 1912. He was so much the stereotype of a small-town undertaker that Carella almost burst out laughing when he met him. Somehow, though, the environment was not conducive to hilarity. There was a strange smell hovering over the thick rugs and the papered walls and the hanging chandeliers. It was a while before Carella recognized it as formaldehyde and then made the automatic association and, curious for a man who had stared into the eyes of death so often, suddenly felt like retching.

"Miss Davis made out a check to you on July fifteenth," Carella said. "Can you tell me what it was for?"

"Sure can," Scoles said. "Had to wait a long time for that check. She give me only a twenty-five-dollar deposit. Usually take fifty, you know. I got stuck many a time, believe me."

"How do you mean?" Carella asked.

"People. You bury their dead, and then sometimes they don't pay you for your work. This business isn't *all* fun, you know. Many's the time I handled the whole funeral and the service and the burial and all, and never did get paid. Makes you lose your faith in human nature."

"But Miss Davis finally *did* pay you."

"Oh, sure. But I can tell you I was sweating that one out. I can tell you that. After all, she was a strange gal from the city, has the funeral here, nobody comes to it but her, sitting in the chapel out there and watching the body as if someone's going to steal it away, just her and the departed. I tell you, Mr. Carella . . . Is that your name?"

"Yes, Carella."

"I tell you, it was kind of spooky. Lay there two days, she did, her cousin. And then Miss Davis asked that we bury the girl right here in the local cemetery, so I done that for her, too—all on the strength of a twenty-five-dollar deposit. That's trust, Mr. Carella, with a capital T."

"When was this, Mr. Scoles?"

"The girl drowned the first weekend in June," Scoles said. "Had no business being out on the lake so early, anyways. That water's still icy cold in June. Don't really warm up none till the latter part July. She fell over the side of the boat—she was out there rowing, you know—and that icy water probably froze her solid, or give her cramps or something, drowned her anyways." Scoles shook his head. "Had no business being out on the lake so early."

"Did you see a death certificate?"

"Yep, Dr. Donnelli made it out. Cause of death was drowning, all right, no question about it. We had an inquest, too, you know. The Tuesday after she drowned. They said it was accidental."

"You said she was out rowing in a boat. Alone?"

"Yep. Her cousin, Miss Davis, was on the shore watching. Jumped in when she fell overboard, tried to

reach her, but couldn't make it in time. That water's plenty cold, believe me. Ain't too warm even now, and here it is August already."

"But it didn't seem to affect Miss Davis, did it?"

"Well, she was probably a strong swimmer. Been my experience most pretty girls are strong girls, too. I'll bet your wife here is a strong girl. She sure is a pretty one."

Scoles smiled, and Teddy smiled and squeezed Carella's hand.

"About the payment," Carella said, "for the funeral and the burial. Do you have any idea why it took Miss Davis so long to send her check?"

"Nope. I wrote her twice. First time was just a friendly little reminder. Second time, I made it a little stronger. Attorney friend of mine in town wrote it on his stationery; that always impresses them. Didn't get an answer either time. Finally, right out of the blue, the check came, payment in full. Beats me. Maybe she was affected by the death. Or maybe she's always slow paying her debts. I'm just happy the check came, that's all. Sometimes the live ones can give you more trouble than them who's dead, believe me."

They strolled down to the lake together, Carella and his wife, and ate their picnic lunch on its shores. Carella was strangely silent. Teddy dangled her bare feet in the water. The water, as Scoles had promised, was very cold even though it was August. On the way back from the lake Carella said, "Honey, would you mind if I make one more stop?"

Teddy turned her eyes to him inquisitively.

"I want to see the chief of police here."

Teddy frowned. The question was in her eyes, and he answered it immediately.

"To find out whether or not there were any witnesses to that drowning. *Besides* Claudia Davis, I mean. From the way Scoles was talking, I get the impression that lake was pretty deserted in June."

The chief of police was a short man with a pot belly and big feet. He kept his feet propped up on his desk all the while he spoke to Carella. Carella watched him and wondered why everybody in this damn town seemed to be on vacation from an MGM movie. A row of rifles in a locked rack was behind the chief's desk. A host of WANTED fliers covered a bulletin board to the right of the rack. The chief had a hole in the sole of his left shoe.

"Yep," he said, "there was a witness, all right."

Carella felt a pang of disappointment. "Who?" he asked.

"Fellow fishing at the lake. Saw the whole thing. Testified before the coroner's jury."

"What'd he say?"

"Said he was fishing there when Josie Thompson took the boat out. Said Claudia Davis stayed behind, on the shore. Said Miss Thompson fell overboard and went under like a stone. Said Miss Davis jumped in the water and began swimming toward

her. Didn't make it in time. That's what he said."

"What else did he say?"

"Well, he drove Miss Davis back to town in her car. 1960 Caddy convertible, I believe. She could hardly speak. She was sobbing and mumbling and wringing her hands, oh, in a hell of a mess. Why, we had to get the whole story out of that fishing fellow. Wasn't until the next day that Miss Davis could make any kind of sense."

"When did you hold the inquest?"

"Tuesday. Day before they buried the cousin. Coroner did the dissection on Monday. We got authorization from Miss Davis, Penal Law 2213, next of kin being charged by law with the duty of burial may authorize dissection for the sole purpose of ascertaining the cause of death."

"And the coroner reported the cause of death as drowning?"

"That's right. Said so right before the jury."

"Why'd you have an inquest? Did you suspect something more than accidental drowning?"

"Not necessarily. But that fellow who was fishing, well, *he* was from the city, too, you know. And for all we knew him and Miss Davis could have been in this together, you know, shoved the cousin over the side of the boat, and then faked up a whole story, you know. They both coulda been lying in their teeth."

"Were they?"

"Not so we could tell. You never seen anybody so grief-stricken as Miss Davis was when the fishing fellow drove her into town. Girl would have to be a hell of an actress to behave that way. Calmed down the next day, but you shoulda seen her when it happened. And at the inquest it was plain this fishing fellow had never met her before that day at the lake. Convinced the jury he had no prior knowledge of or connection with either of the two girls. Convinced me, too, for that matter."

"What's his name?" Carella asked. "This fishing fellow."

"Courtenoy."

"What did you say?"

"Courtenoy. Sidney Courtenoy."

"Thanks," Carella answered, and he rose suddenly. "Come on, Teddy. I want to get back to the city."

7.

Courtenoy lived in a one-family clapboard house in Riverhead. He was rolling up the door of his garage when Carella and Meyer pulled into his driveway early Monday morning. He turned to look at the car curiously, one hand on the rising garage door. The door stopped, halfway up, halfway down. Carella stepped into the driveway.

"Mr. Courtenoy?" he asked.

"Yes?" He stared at Carella, puzzlement on his face, the puzzlement that is always there when a perfect stranger addresses you by name. Courtenoy was a man in his late forties, wearing a cap and a badly-fitted sports jacket and dark flannel slacks in the month of August. His hair was

graying at the temples. He looked tired, very tired, and his weariness had nothing whatever to do with the fact that it was only seven o'clock in the morning. A lunch box was at his feet where he had apparently put it when he began rolling up the garage door. The car in the garage was a 1953 Ford.

"We're police officers," Carella said. "Mind if we ask you a few questions?"

"I'd like to see your badge," Courtenoy said. Carella showed it to him. Courtenoy nodded as if he had performed a precautionary public duty. "What are your questions?" he said. "I'm on my way to work. Is this about that damn building permit again?"

"What building permit?"

"For extending the garage. I'm buying my son a little jalopy, don't want to leave it out on the street. Been having a hell of a time getting a building permit. Can you imagine that? All I want to do is add another twelve feet to the garage. You'd think I was trying to build a city park or something. Is that what this is about?"

From inside the house a woman's voice called, "Who is it, Sid?"

"Nothing, nothing," Courtenoy said impatiently. "Nobody. Never mind, Bett." He looked at Carella. "My wife. You married?"

"Yes, sir, I'm married," Carella said.

"Then you know," Courtenoy said cryptically. "What are your questions?"

"Ever see this before?" Carella asked. He handed a photostated copy of the check to Courtenoy, who looked at it briefly and handed it back.

"Sure."

"Want to explain it, Mr. Courtenoy?"

"Explain what?"

"Explain why Claudia Davis sent you a check for a hundred and twenty dollars."

"As recompense," Courtenoy said unhesitatingly.

"Oh, recompense, huh?" Meyer said. "For what, Mr. Courtenoy? For a little cock-and-bull story?"

"Huh? What are you talking about?"

"Recompense for *what*, Mr. Courtenoy?"

"For missing three days' work, what the hell did you think?"

"How's that again?"

"No, what did you *think?*" Courtenoy said angrily, waving his finger at Meyer. "What did you think it was for? Some kind of payoff or something? Is that what you thought?"

"Mr. Courtenoy . . ."

"I lost three days' work because of that damn inquest. I had to stay up at Triangle Lake all day Monday and Tuesday and then again on Wednesday waiting for the jury decision. I'm a house painter. I get five bucks an hour and I lost three days' work, eight hours a day, and so Miss Davis was good enough to send me a check for a hundred and twenty bucks. Now just what the hell did you think, would you mind telling me?"

"Did you know Miss Davis before

that day at Triangle Lake, Mr. Courtenoy?"

"Never saw her before in my life. What is this? Am I on trial here? What is this?"

From inside the house the woman's voice came again, sharply, "Sidney! Is something wrong? Are you all right?"

"Nothing's wrong. Shut up, will you?"

There was an aggrieved silence from within the clapboard structure. Courtenoy muttered something under his breath and then turned to face the detectives again. "You finished?" he said.

"Not quite, Mr. Courtenoy. We'd like you to tell us what you saw that day at the lake."

"What the hell for? Go read the minutes of the inquest if you're so damn interested. I've got to get to work."

"That can wait, Mr. Courtenoy."

"Like hell it can. This job is away over in . . ."

"Mr. Courtenoy, we don't want to have to go all the way downtown and come back with a warrant for your arrest."

"My *arrest!* For what? Listen, what did I . . . ?"

"Sidney? Sidney, shall I call the police?" the woman shouted from inside the house.

"Oh, shut the hell up!" Courtenoy answered. "Call the police," he mumbled. "I'm up to my ears in cops, and she wants to call the police. What do you want from me? I'm an honest painter. I saw a girl drown. I told it just the way I saw it. Is that a crime? Why are you bothering me?"

"Just tell it again, Mr. Courtenoy. Just the way you saw it."

"She was out in the boat," Courtenoy said, sighing. "I was fishing. Her cousin was on the shore. She fell over the side."

"Josie Thompson."

"Yes, Josie Thompson, whatever the hell her name was."

"She was alone in the boat?"

"Yes. She was alone in the boat."

"Go on."

"The other one—Miss Davis—screamed and ran into the water, and began swimming toward her." He shook his head. "She didn't make it in time. That boat was a long way out. When she got there, the lake was still. She dove under and came up, and then dove under again, but it was too late, it was just too late. Then, as she was swimming back, I thought *she* was going to drown, too. She faltered and sank below the surface, and I waited and I thought sure she was gone. Then there was a patch of yellow that broke through the water, and I saw she was all right."

"Why didn't you jump in to help her, Mr. Courtenoy?"

"I don't know how to swim."

"All right. What happened next?"

"She came out of the water—Miss Davis. She was exhausted and hysterical. I tried to calm her down, but she kept yelling and crying, not making any sense at all. I dragged her over to the car, and I asked her for the car keys. She didn't seem to know what I was talking about at first. 'The

keys!' I said, and she just stared at me. 'Your car keys!' I yelled. 'The keys to the car.' Finally she reached in her purse and handed me the keys."

"Go on."

"I drove her into town. It was me who told the story to the police. She couldn't talk, all she could do was babble and scream and cry. It was a terrible thing to watch. I'd never before seen a woman so completely off her nut. We couldn't get two straight words out of her until the next day. Then she was all right. Told the police who she was, explained what I'd already told them the day before, and told them the dead girl was her cousin, Josie Thompson. They dragged the lake and got her out of the water. A shame. A real shame. Nice young girl like that."

"What was she wearing?"

"Cotton dress. Loafers, I think. Or sandals. Little thin sweater over the dress. A cardigan."

"Any jewelry?"

"I don't think so. No."

"Was she carrying a purse?"

"No. Her purse was in the car with Miss Davis'."

"What was Miss Davis wearing?"

"When? The day of the drowning? Or when they pulled her cousin out of the lake?"

"Was she there then?"

"Sure. Identified the body."

"No, I wanted to know what she was wearing on the day of the accident, Mr. Courtenoy."

"Oh, a skirt and a blouse, I think. Ribbon in her hair. Loafers. I'm not sure."

"What color blouse? Yellow?"

"No. Blue."

"You said yellow."

"No, blue. I didn't say yellow."

Carella frowned. "I thought you said yellow earlier." He shrugged. "All right, what happened after the inquest?"

"Nothing much. Miss Davis thanked me for being so kind and said she would send me a check for the time I'd missed. I refused at first, and then I thought, What the hell, I'm a hard-working man, and money doesn't grow on trees. So I gave her my address. I figured she could afford it. Driving a Caddy, and hiring a fellow to take it back to the city."

"Why didn't she drive it back herself?"

"I don't know. I guess she was still a little shaken. Listen, that was a terrible experience. Did you ever see anyone die up close?"

"Yes," Carella said.

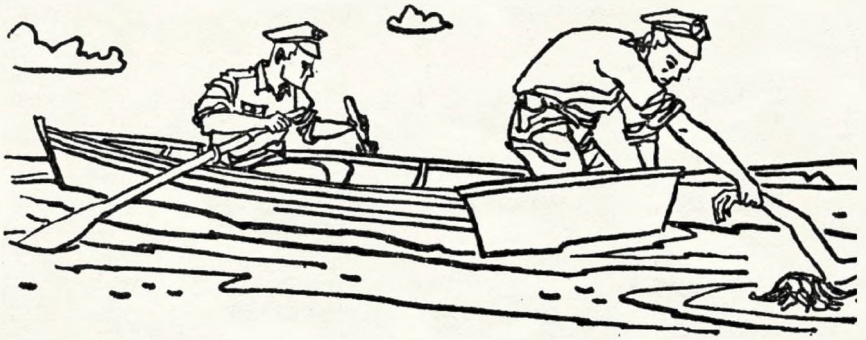
From inside the house Courtenoy's wife yelled, "Sidney, tell those men to get out of our driveway!"

"You heard her," Courtenoy said, and finished rolling up his garage door.

8.

Nobody likes Monday morning.

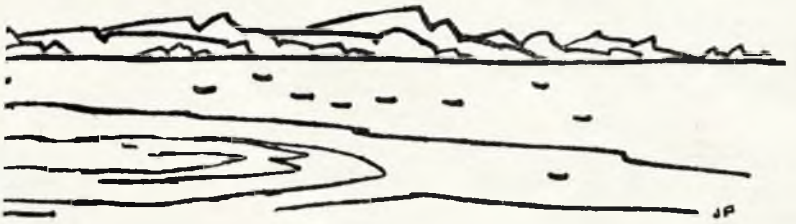
It was invented for hang-overs. It is really not the beginning of a new week, but only the tail end of the week before. Nobody likes it, and it doesn't have to be rainy or gloomy or blue in order to provoke disaffection. It can be bright and sunny and the beginning of August. It can start with



a driveway interview at seven A.M. and grow progressively worse by nine-thirty that same morning. Monday is Monday, and legislature will never change its personality. Monday is Monday, and it stinks.

By nine-thirty that Monday morning, Detective Steve Carella was on the edge of total bewilderment and, like any normal person, he blamed it on Monday. He had come back to the squadroom and painstakingly gone over the pile of checks Claudia Davis had written during the month of July, a total of twenty-five, searching them for some clue to her strangulation, studying them with the scrutiny of a typographer in a print shop. Several things seemed evident from the checks, but nothing seemed pertinent. He could recall having said: "I look at those checks, I can see a life. It's like reading somebody's diary," and he was beginning to believe he had uttered some famous last words in those two succinct sentences. For if this were the diary of Claudia Davis, it was a singularly unprovocative account that would never make the nation's best-seller lists.

Most of the checks had been made out to clothing or department stores. Claudia, true to the species, seemed to have a penchant for shopping and a checkbook that yielded to her spending urge. Calls to the various stores represented revealed that her taste ranged through a wide variety of items. A check of sales slips showed that she had purchased during the month of July alone three Baby Doll nightgowns, two half slips, a trenchcoat, a wrist watch, four pairs of tapered slacks in various colors, two pairs of walking shoes, a pair of sunglasses, four Bikini swimsuits, eight wash-and-wear frocks, two skirts, two cashmere sweaters, half-a-dozen best-selling novels, a large bottle of aspirin, two bottles of dramamine, six pieces of luggage, and four boxes of cleansing tissue. The most expensive thing she purchased was an evening gown costing $500. These purchases accounted for most of the checks she had drawn in July. There were also checks to a hairdresser, a florist, a shoemaker, a candy shop, and three unexplained checks that were drawn to individuals, two men and a woman.



The first was made out to George Badueck.

The second was made out to David Oblinsky.

The third was made out to Martha Fedelson.

Someone on the squad had attacked the telephone directory and come up with addresses for two of the three. The third, Oblinsky, had an unlisted number, but a half-hour's argument with a supervisor had finally netted an address for him. The completed list was now on Carella's desk together with all the canceled checks. He should have begun tracking down those names, he knew, but something still was bugging him.

"Why did Courtenoy lie to me and Meyer?" he asked Cotton Hawes. "Why did he lie about something as simple as what Claudia Davis was wearing on the day of the drowning?"

"How did he lie?"

"First he said she was wearing yellow, said he saw a patch of yellow break the surface of the lake. Then he changed it to blue. Why did he do that, Cotton?"

"I don't know."

"And if he lied about that, why couldn't he have been lying about everything? Why couldn't he and Claudia have done in little Josie together?"

"I don't know," Hawes said.

"Where'd that twenty thousand bucks come from, Cotton?"

"Maybe it was a stock dividend."

"Maybe. Then why didn't she simply deposit the check? This was cash, Cotton, *cash*. Now where did it come from? That's a nice piece of change. You don't pick twenty grand out of the gutter."

"I suppose not."

"I know where you can get twenty grand, Cotton."

"Where?"

"From an insurance company. When someone dies." Carella nodded once, sharply. "I'm going to make some calls. Damnit, that money had to come from *some*place."

He hit pay dirt on his sixth call. The man he spoke to was named Jeremiah Dodd and was a representative of the Security Insurance Corporation, Inc. He recognized Josie Thompson's name at once.

"Oh, yes," he said. "We settled that claim in July."

"Who made the claim, Mr. Dodd?"

"The beneficiary, of course. Just a moment. Let me get the folder on this. Will you hold on, please?"

Carella waited impatiently. Over at the insurance company on the other end of the line he could hear muted voices. A girl giggled suddenly, and he wondered who was kissing whom over by the water cooler. At last Dodd came back on the line.

"Here it is," he said. "Josephine Thompson. Beneficiary was her cousin, Miss Claudia Davis. Oh, yes, now it's all coming back. Yes, this is the one."

"What one?"

"Where the girls were mutual beneficiaries."

"What do you mean?"

"The cousins," Dodd said. "There were two life policies. One for Miss Davis and one for Miss Thompson. And they were mutual beneficiaries."

"You mean Miss Davis was the beneficiary of Miss Thompson's policy and vice versa?"

"Yes, that's right."

"That's very interesting. How large were the policies?"

"Oh, very small."

"Well, how *small* then?"

"I believe they were both insured for twelve thousand five hundred. Just a moment; let me check. Yes, that's right."

"And Miss Davis applied for payment on the policy after her cousin died, huh?"

"Yes. Here it is, right here. Josephine Thompson drowned at Lake Triangle on June 4, 1960. That's right. Claudia Davis sent in the policy and the certificate of death and also a coroner's jury verdict."

"She didn't miss a trick, did she?"

"Sir? I'm sorry, I . . ."

"Did you pay her?"

"Yes. It was a perfectly legitimate claim. We began processing it at once."

"Did you send anyone up to Lake Triangle to investigate the circumstances of Miss Thompson's death?"

"Yes, but it was merely a routine investigation. A coroner's inquest is good enough for us, Detective Carella."

"When did you pay Miss Davis?"

"On July first."

"You sent her a check for twelve thousand five hundred dollars, is that right?"

"No, sir."

"Didn't you say . . . ?"

"The policy insured her for twelve-five, that's correct. But there was a double-indemnity clause, you see, and Josephine Thompson's death was accidental. No, we had to pay the policy's limit, Detective Carella. On July first we sent Claudia Davis a check for twenty-five thousand dollars."

9.

There are no mysteries in police work.

Nothing fits into a carefully preconceived scheme. The high point of any given case is very often the corpse that opens the case. There is

no climactic progression; suspense is for the movies. There are only people and curiously twisted motives, and small unexplained details, and coincidence, and the unexpected, and they combine to form a sequence of events, but there is no real mystery, there never is. There is only life, and sometimes death, and neither follows a rule book. Policemen hate mystery stories because they recognize in them a control that is lacking in their own very real, sometimes routine, sometimes spectacular, sometimes tedious investigation of a case. It is very nice and very clever and very convenient to have all the pieces fit together neatly. It is very kind to think of detectives as master mathematicians working on an algebraic problem whose constants are death and a victim, whose unknown is a murderer. But many of these mastermind detectives have trouble adding up the deductions on their twice-monthly pay checks. The world is full of wizards, for sure, but hardly any of them work for the city police.

There was one big mathematical discrepancy in the Claudia Davis case.

There seemed to be $5,000 unaccounted for.

Twenty-five grand had been mailed to Claudia Davis on July 1, and she presumably received the check after the Fourth-of-July holiday, cashed it someplace, and then took her money to the Seaboard Bank of America, opened a new checking account, and rented a safety-deposit box. But her total deposit at Seaboard had been $20,000 whereas the check had been for $25,000, so where was the laggard five? And who had cashed the check for her? Mr. Dodd of the Security Insurance Corporation, Inc., explained the company's rather complicated accounting system to Carella. A check was kept in the local office for several days after it was cashed in order to close out the policy, after which it was sent to the main office in Chicago where it sometimes stayed for several weeks until the master files were closed out. It was then sent to the company's accounting and auditing firm in San Francisco. It was Dodd's guess that the canceled check had already been sent to the California accountants, and he promised to put a trace on it at once. Carella asked him to please hurry. Someone had cashed that check for Claudia and, supposedly, someone also had one fifth of the check's face value.

The very fact that Claudia had not taken the check itself to Seaboard seemed to indicate that she had something to hide. Presumably, she did not want anyone asking questions about insurance company checks, or insurance policies, or double indemnities, or accidental drownings, or especially her cousin Josie. The check was a perfectly good one, and yet she had chosen to cash it *before* opening a new account. Why? And why, for that matter, had she bothered opening a new account when she had a rather well-stuffed and active account at another bank?

There are only whys in police work, but they do not add up to mys-

tery. They add up to work, and nobody in the world likes work. The bulls of the 87th would have preferred to sit on their backsides and sip at gin and tonics, but the whys were there, so they put on their hats and their holsters and tried to find some becauses.

Cotton Hawes systematically interrogated each and every tenant in the rooming house where Claudia Davis had been killed. They all had alibis tighter than the closed fist of an Arabian stablekeeper. In his report to the lieutenant, Hawes expressed the belief that none of the tenants was guilty of homicide. As far as he was concerned, they were all clean.

Meyer Meyer attacked the 87th's stool pigeons. There were money-changers galore in the precinct and the city, men who turned hot loot into cold cash—for a price. If someone had cashed a $25,000 check for Claudia and kept $5,000 of it during the process, couldn't that person conceivably be one of the money-changers? He put the precinct stoolies on the ear, asked them to sound around for word of a Security Insurance Corporation check. The stoolies came up with nothing.

Detective Lieutenant Sam Grossman took his laboratory boys to the murder room and went over it again. And again. And again. He reported that the lock on the door was a snap lock, the kind that clicks shut automatically when the door is slammed. Whoever killed Claudia Davis could have done so without performing any locked-room gymnastics. All he had to do was close the door behind him when he left. Grossman also reported that Claudia's bed had apparently not been slept in on the night of the murder. A pair of shoes had been found at the foot of a large easy chair in the bedroom and a novel was wedged open on the arm of the chair. He suggested that Claudia had fallen asleep while reading, had awakened, and gone into the other room where she had met her murderer and her death. He had no suggestions as to just who that murderer might have been.

Steve Carella was hot and impatient and overloaded. There were other things happening in the precinct, things like burglaries and muggings and knifings and assaults and kids with summertime on their hands hitting other kids with ball bats because they didn't like the way they pronounced the word *"señor."* There were telephones jangling, and reports to be typed in triplicate, and people filing into the squadroom day and night with complaints against the citizenry of that fair city, and the Claudia Davis case was beginning to be a big fat pain in the keester. Carella wondered what it was like to be a shoemaker. And while he was wondering, he began to chase down the checks made out to George Badueck, David Oblinsky, and Martha Fedelson.

Happily, Bert Kling had nothing whatever to do with the Claudia Davis case. He hadn't even discussed it with any of the men on the squad. He was a young detective and a new

detective, and the things that happened in that precinct were enough to drive a guy nuts and keep him busy forty-eight hours every day, so he didn't go around sticking his nose into other people's cases. He had enough troubles of his own. One of those troubles was the line-up.

On Wednesday morning Bert Kling's name appeared on the line-up duty chart.

10.

The line-up was held in the gym downtown at Headquarters on High Street. It was held four days a week, Monday to Thursday, and the purpose of the parade was to acquaint the city's detectives with the people who were committing crime, the premise being that crime is a repetitive profession and that a crook will always be a crook, and it's good to know who your adversaries are should you happen to come face to face with them on the street. Timely recognition of a thief had helped crack many a case and had, on some occasions, even saved a detective's life. So the line-up was a pretty valuable in-group custom. This didn't mean that detectives enjoyed the trip downtown. They drew line-up perhaps once every two weeks and, often as not, line-up duty fell on their day off, and nobody appreciated rubbing elbows with criminals on his day off.

The line-up that Wednesday morning followed the classic pattern of all line-ups. The detectives sat in the gymnasium on folding chairs, and the chief of detectives sat behind a high podium at the back of the gym. The green shades were drawn, and the stage illuminated, and the offenders who'd been arrested the day before were marched before the assembled bulls while the chief read off the charges and handled the interrogation. The pattern was a simple one. The arresting officer, uniformed or plain-clothes, would join the chief at the rear of the gym when his arrest came up. The chief would read off the felon's name, and then the section of the city in which he'd been arrested, and then a number. He would say, for example, "Kling, Bert. Riverhead, three." The "three" would simply indicate that this was the third arrest in Riverhead that day. Only felonies and special types of misdemeanors were handled at the line-up, so this narrowed the list of performers on any given day. Following the case number, the chief would read off the offense, and then say either "Statement" or "No statement," telling the assembled cops that the thief either had or had not said anything when they'd put the collar on him. If there had been a statement, the chief would limit his questions to rather general topics since he didn't want to lead the felon into saying anything that might contradict his usually incriminating initial statement, words that could be used against him in court. If there had been *no* statement, the chief would pull out all the stops. He was generally armed with whatever police records were available on the man who stood under the blind-

ing lights, and it was the smart thief who understood the purpose of the line-up and who knew he was not bound to answer a goddamned thing they asked him. The chief of detectives was something like a deadly earnest Mike Wallace, but the stakes were slightly higher here because this involved something a little more important than a novelist plugging his new book or a senator explaining the stand he had taken on a farm bill. These were truly "interviews in depth," and the booby prize was very often a long stretch up the river in a cozy one-windowed room.

The line-up bored the hell out of Kling. It always did. It was like seeing a stage show for the hundredth time. Every now and then somebody stopped the show with a really good routine. But usually it was the same old song and dance. It wasn't any different that Wednesday. By the time the eighth offender had been paraded and subjected to the chief's bludgeoning interrogation, Kling was beginning to doze. The detective sitting next to him nudged him gently in the ribs.

". . . Reynolds, Ralph," the chief was saying, "Isola, four. Caught burgling an apartment on North Third. No statement. How about it, Ralph?"

"How about what?"

"You do this sort of thing often?"

"What sort of thing?"

"Burglary."

"I'm no burglar," Reynolds said.

"I've got his B-sheet here," the chief said. "Arrested for burglary in 1948, witness withdrew her testimony, claimed she had mistakenly identified him. Arrested again for burglary in 1952, convicted for Burglary One, sentenced to ten at Castleview, paroled in '58 on good behavior. You're back at the old stand, huh, Ralph?"

"No, not me. I've been straight ever since I got out."

"Then what were you doing in that apartment during the middle of the night?"

"I was a little drunk. I must have walked into the wrong building."

"What do you mean?"

"I thought it was my apartment."

"Where do you live, Ralph?"

"On . . . uh . . . well . . ."

"Come on, Ralph."

"Well, I live on South Fifth."

"And the apartment you were in last night is on North Third. You must have been pretty drunk to wander that far off course."

"Yeah, I guess I was pretty drunk."

"Woman in that apartment said you hit her when she woke up. Is that true, Ralph?"

"No. No, hey, I never hit her."

"She says so, Ralph."

"Well, she's mistaken."

"Well, now, a doctor's report says somebody clipped her on the jaw, Ralph, now how about that?"

"Well, maybe."

"Yes or no?"

"Well, maybe when she started screaming she got me nervous. I mean, you know, I thought it was my apartment and all."

"Ralph, you were burgling that apartment. How about telling us the truth."

"No, I got in there by mistake."

"How'd you get in?"

"The door was open."

"In the middle of the night, huh? The door was open?"

"Yeah."

"You sure you didn't pick the lock or something, huh?"

"No, no. Why would I do that? I thought it was my apartment."

"Ralph, what were you doing with burglars' tools?"

"Who? Who me? Those weren't burglars' tools."

"Then what were they? You had a glass cutter, and a bunch of jimmies, and some punches, and a drill and bits, and three celluloid strips, and some lock-picking tools, and eight skeleton keys. Those sound like burglars' tools to me, Ralph."

"No. I'm a carpenter."

"Yeah, you're a carpenter all right, Ralph. We searched your apartment, Ralph, and found a couple of things we're curious about. Do you always keep sixteen wrist watches and four typewriters and twelve bracelets and eight rings and a mink stole and three sets of silverware, Ralph?"

"Yeah. I'm a collector."

"Of other people's things. We also found four hundred dollars in American currency and five thousand dollars in French francs. Where'd you get that money, Ralph?"

"Which?"

"Whichever you feel like telling us about."

"Well, the U.S. stuff I . . . I won at the track. And the other, well, a Frenchman owed me some gold, and so he paid me in francs. That's all."

"We're checking our stolen-goods list right this minute, Ralph."

"So check!" Reynolds said, suddenly angry. "What the hell do you want from me? Work for your goddamn living! You want it all on a platter? Like fun! I told you everything I'm gonna . . ."

"Get him out of here," the chief said. "Next. Blake, Donald, Bethtown, two. Attempted rape. No statement . . ."

Bert Kling made himself comfortable on the folding chair and began to doze again.

11.

The check made out to George Badueck was numbered 018. It was a small check, five dollars. It did not seem very important to Carella, but it was one of the unexplained three, and he decided to give it a whirl.

Badueck, as it turned out, was a photographer. His shop was directly across the street from the County Court Building in Isola. A sign in his window advised that he took photographs for chauffeurs' licenses, hunting licenses, passports, taxicab permits, pistol permits, and the like. The shop was small and crowded. Badueck fit into the shop like a beetle in an ant trap. He was a huge man with thick, unruly black hair and the smell of developing fluid on him.

"Who remembers?" he said. "I get

millions of people in here every day of the week. They pay me in cash, they pay me with checks, they're ugly, they're pretty, they're skinny, they're fat, they all look the same on the pictures I take. Lousy. They all look like I'm photographing them for you guys. You never see any of these official-type pictures? Man, they look like mug shots, all of them. So who remembers this . . . what's her name? Claudia Davis, yeah. Another face that's all. Another mug shot. Why? Is the check bad or something?"

"No, it's a good check."

"So what's the fuss?"

"No fuss," Carella said. "Thanks a lot."

He sighed and went out into the August heat. The County Court Building across the street was white and Gothic in the sunshine. He wiped a handkerchief across his forehead and thought, *Another face, that's all.* Sighing, he crossed the street and entered the building. It was cool in the high vaulted corridors. He consulted the directory and went up to the Bureau of Motor Vehicles first. He asked the clerk there if anyone named Claudia Davis had applied for a license requiring a photograph.

"We only require pictures on chauffeurs' licenses," the clerk said.

"Well, would you check?" Carella asked.

"Sure. Might take a few minutes, though. Would you have a seat?"

Carella sat. It was very cool. It felt like October. He looked at his watch. It was almost time for lunch, and he was getting hungry. The clerk came back and motioned him over.

"We've got a Claudia Davis listed," he said, "but she's already got a license, and she didn't apply for a new one."

"What kind of license?"

"Operator's."

"When does it expire?"

"Next September."

"And she hasn't applied for anything needing a photo?"

"Nope. Sorry."

"That's all right. Thanks," Carella said.

He went out into the corridor again. He hardly thought it likely that Claudia Davis had applied for a permit to own or operate a taxicab, so he skipped the Hack Bureau and went upstairs to Pistol Permits. The woman he spoke to there was very kind and very efficient. She checked her files and told him that no one named Claudia Davis had ever applied for either a carry or a premises pistol permit. Carella thanked her and went into the hall again. He was very hungry. His stomach was beginning to growl. He debated having lunch and then returning and decided, *Hell, I'd better get it done now.*

The man behind the counter in the Passport Bureau was old and thin and he wore a green eyeshade. Carella asked his question, and the old man went to his files and creakingly returned to the window.

"That's right," he said.

"What's right?"

"She did. Claudia Davis. She applied for a passport."

"When?"

The old man checked the slip of paper in his trembling hands. "July twentieth," he said.

"Did you give it to her?"

"We accepted her application, sure. Isn't us who issues the passports. We've got to send the application on to Washington."

"But you did accept it?"

"Sure, why not? Had all the necessary stuff. Why shouldn't we accept it?"

"What was the necessary stuff?"

"Two photos, proof of citizenship, filled-out application, and cash."

"What did she show as proof of citizenship?"

"Her birth certificate."

"Where was she born?"

"California."

"She paid you in cash?"

"That's right."

"Not a check?"

"Nope. She started to write a check, but the blamed pen was on the blink. We use ballpoints, you know, and it gave out after she filled in the application. So she paid me in cash. It's not all that much money, you know."

"I see. Thank you," Carella said.

"Not at all," the old man replied, and he creaked back to his files to replace the record on Claudia Davis.

The check was numbered 007, and it was dated July 12, 1960, and it was made out to a woman named Martha Fedelson.

Miss Fedelson adjusted her pince-nez and looked at the check. Then she moved some papers aside on the small desk in the cluttered office, and put the check down, and leaned closer to it, and studied it again.

"Yes," she said, "that check was made out to me. Claudia Davis wrote it right in this office." Miss Fedelson smiled. "If you can call it an office. Desk space and a telephone. But then, I'm just starting, you know."

"How long have you been a travel agent, Miss Fedelson?"

"Six months now. It's very exciting work."

"Had you ever booked a trip for Miss Davis before?"

"No. This was the first time."

"Did someone refer her to you?"

"No. She picked my name out of the phone book."

"And asked you to arrange this trip for her, is that right?"

"Yes."

"And this check? What's it for?"

"Her airline tickets, and deposits at several hotels."

"Hotels *where?*"

"In Paris and Dijon. And then another in Lausanne, Switzerland."

"She was going to Europe?"

"Yes. From Lausanne she was heading down to the Italian Riviera. I was working on that for her, too. Getting transportation and the hotels, you know."

"When did she plan to leave?"

"September first."

"Well, that explains the luggage and the clothes," Carella said aloud.

"I'm sorry," Miss Fedelson said, and she smiled and raised her eyebrows.

"Nothing, nothing," Carella said. "What was your impression of Miss Davis?"

"Oh, that's hard to say. She was only here once, you understand." Miss Fedelson thought for a moment, and then said, "I suppose she *could* have been a pretty girl if she tried, but she wasn't trying. Her hair was short and dark, and she seemed rather—well, withdrawn, I guess. She didn't take her sunglasses off all the while she was here. I suppose you would call her shy. Or frightened. I don't know." Miss Fedelson smiled again. "Have I helped you any?"

"Well, now we know she was going abroad," Carella said.

"September is a good time to go," Miss Fedelson answered. "In September the tourists have all gone home." There was a wistful sound to her voice. Carella thanked her for her time and left the small office with its travel folders on the cluttered desk top.

12.

He was running out of checks and running out of ideas. Everything seemed to point toward a girl in flight, a girl in hiding, but what was there to hide, what was there to run from? Josie Thompson had been in that boat alone. The coroner's jury had labeled it accidental drowning. The insurance company hadn't contested Claudia's claim, and they'd given her a legitimate check that she could have cashed anywhere in the world. And yet there *was* hiding, and there *was* flight—and he couldn't understand why.

He took the list of remaining checks from his pocket. The girl's shoemaker, the girl's hairdresser, a florist, a candy shop. None of them truly important. And the remaining check made out to an individual, the check numbered 006 and dated July 11, 1960, and written to a man named David Oblinsky in the amount of $45.75. Carella had his lunch at two-thirty and then went downtown. He found Oblinsky in a diner near the bus terminal. Oblinsky was sitting on one of the counter stools, and he was drinking a cup of coffee. He asked Carella to join him, and Carella did.

"You traced me through that check, huh?" he said. "The phone company gave you my number and my address, huh? I'm unlisted, you know. They ain't supposed to give out my number."

"Well, they made a special concession because it was police business."

"Yeah, well, suppose the cops called and asked for Marlon Brando's number? You think they'd give it out? Like hell they would. I don't like that. No, sir, I don't like it one damn bit."

"What do you do, Mr. Oblinsky? Is there a reason for the unlisted number?"

"I drive a cab is what I do. Sure there's a reason. It's classy to have an unlisted number. Didn't you know that?"

Carella smiled. "No, I didn't."

"Sure, it is."

"Why did Claudia Davis give you this check?" Carella asked.

"Well, I work for a cab company here in this city, you see. But usually on weekends or on my day off I use my own car and I take people on long trips, you know what I mean? Like to the country, or the mountains, or the beach, wherever they want to go. I don't care. I'll take them wherever they want to go."

"I see."

"Sure. So in June sometime, the beginning of June it was, I get a call from this guy I know up at Triangle Lake, he tells me there's a rich broad there who needs somebody to drive her Caddy back to the city for her. He said it was worth thirty bucks if I was willing to take the train up and the heap back. I told him, no, sir, I wanted forty-five or it was no deal. I knew I had him over a barrel, you understand? He'd already told me he checked with the local hicks and none of them felt like making the ride. So he said he would talk it over with her and get back to me. Well, he called again . . . you know, it burns me up about the phone company. They ain't supposed to give out my number like that. Suppose it was Marilyn Monroe? You think they'd give out her number? I'm gonna raise a stink about this, believe me."

"What happened when he called you back?"

"Well, he said she was willing to pay forty-five, but like could I wait until July sometime when she would send me a check because she was a little short of cash right at the moment. So I figured what the hell, am I going to get stiffed by a dame who's driving a 1960 Caddy? I figured I could trust her until July. But I also told him, if that was the case, then I also wanted her to pay the tolls on the way back, which I don't ordinarily ask my customers to do. That's what the seventy-five cents was for. The tolls."

"So you took the train up there and then drove Miss Davis and the Cadillac back to the city, is that right?"

"Yeah."

"I suppose she was pretty distraught on the trip home."

"Huh?"

"You know. Not too coherent."

"Huh?"

"Broken up. Crying. Hysterical," Carella said.

"No. No, she was okay."

"Well, what I mean is . . ." Carella hesitated. "I assumed she wasn't capable of driving the car back herself."

"Yeah, that's right. That's why she hired me."

"Well, then . . ."

"But not because she was broken up or anything."

"Then why?" Carella frowned. "Was there a lot of luggage? Did she need your help with that?"

"Yeah, sure. Both hers and her cousin's. Her cousin drowned, you know."

"Yes, I know that."

"But anybody coulda helped her with the luggage," Oblinsky said. "No, that wasn't why she hired me. She really *needed* me, mister."

"Why?"

"Why? Because she don't know how to drive, that's why."

Carella stared at him. "You're wrong," he said.

"Oh, no," Oblinsky said. "She can't drive, believe me. While I was putting the luggage in the trunk, I asked her to start the car, and she didn't even know how to do that. Hey, you think I ought to raise a fuss with the phone company?"

"I don't know," Carella said, rising suddenly. All at once the check made out to Claudia Davis' hairdresser seemed terribly important to him. He had almost run out of checks, but all at once he had an idea.

13.

The hairdresser's salon was on South Twenty-third, just off Jefferson Avenue. A green canopy covered the sidewalk outside the salon. The words ARTURO MANFREDI, INC., were lettered discreetly in white on the canopy. A glass plaque in the window repeated the name of the establishment and added, for the benefit of those who did not read either *Vogue* or *Harper's Bazaar,* that there were two branches of the shop, one here in Isola and another in "Nassau, the Bahamas." Beneath that, in smaller, more modest letters, were the words "Internationally Renowned." Carella and Hawes went into the shop at four-thirty in the afternoon. Two meticulously coifed and manicured women were sitting in the small reception room, their expensively sleek legs crossed, apparently awaiting either their chauffeurs, their husbands, or their lovers. They both looked up expectantly when the detectives entered, expressed mild disappointment by only slightly raising newly-plucked eyebrows, and went back to reading their fashion magazines. Carella and Hawes walked to the desk. The girl behind the desk was a blonde with a brilliant shellacked look and an English finishing-school voice.

"Yes?" she said. "May I help you?"

She lost a tiny trace of her poise when Carella flashed his buzzer. She read the raised lettering on the shield, glanced at the photo on the plastic-encased I.D. card, quickly regained her polished calm, and said coolly and unemotionally, "Yes, what can I do for you?"

"We wonder if you can tell us anything about the girl who wrote this check?" Carella said. He reached into his jacket pocket, took out a folded photostat of the check, unfolded it, and put it on the desk before the blonde. The blonde looked at it casually.

"What is the name?" she asked. "I can't make it out."

"Claudia Davis."

"D-A-V-I-S?"

"Yes."

"I don't recognize the name," the blonde said. "She's not one of our regular customers."

"But she did make out a check to your salon," Carella said. "She wrote this on July seventh. Would you

please check your records and find out why she was here and who took care of her?"

"I'm sorry," the blonde said.

"What?"

"I'm sorry, but we close at five o'clock, and this is the busiest time of the day for us. I'm sure you can understand that. If you'd care to come back a little later . . ."

"No, we wouldn't care to come back a little later," Carella said. "Because if we came back a little later, it would be with a search warrant and possibly a warrant for the seizure of your books, and sometimes that can cause a little commotion among the gossip columnists, and that kind of commotion might add to your international renown a little bit. We've had a long day, miss, and this is important, so how about it?"

"Of course. We're always delighted to cooperate with the police," the blonde said frigidly. "Especially when they're so well mannered."

"Yes, we're all of that," Carella answered.

"Yes. July seventh, did you say?"

"July seventh."

The blonde left the desk and went into the back of the salon. A brunette came out front and said, "Has Miss Marie left for the evening?"

"Who's Miss Marie?" Hawes asked.

"The blond girl."

"No. She's getting something for us."

"That white streak is very attractive," the brunette said. "I'm Miss Olga."

"How do you do."

"Fine, thank you," Miss Olga said. "When she comes back, would you tell her there's something wrong with one of the dryers on the third floor?"

"Yes, I will," Hawes said.

Miss Olga smiled, waved, and vanished into the rear of the salon again. Miss Marie reappeared not a moment later. She looked at Carella and said, "A Miss Claudia Davis was here on July seventh. Mr. Sam worked on her. Would you like to talk to him?"

"Yes, we would."

"Then follow me, please," she said curtly.

They followed her into the back of the salon past women who sat with crossed legs, wearing smocks, their heads in hair dryers.

"Oh, by the way," Hawes said, "Miss Olga said to tell you there's something wrong with one of the third-floor dryers."

"Thank you," Miss Marie said.

Hawes felt particularly clumsy in this world of women's machines. There was an air of delicate efficiency about the place, and Hawes—six feet two inches tall in his bare soles, weighing in at a hundred and ninety pounds—was certain he would knock over a bottle of nail polish or a pail of hair rinse. As they entered the second-floor salon, as he looked down that long line of humming space helmets at women with crossed legs and what looked like barbers' aprons covering their nylon slips, he became aware of a new phenomenon. The women were slowly turning their heads inside the dryers to look at the

white streak over his left temple. He suddenly felt like a horse's ass. For whereas the streak was the legitimate result of a knifing—they had shaved his red hair to get at the wound, and it had grown back this way—he realized all at once that many of these women had shelled out hard-earned dollars to simulate identical white streaks in their own hair, and he no longer felt like a cop making a business call. Instead, he felt like a customer who had come to have his goddamned streak touched up a little.

"This is Mr. Sam," Miss Marie said, and Hawes turned to see Carella shaking hands with a rather elongated man. The man wasn't particularly tall, he was simply elongated. He gave the impression of being seen from the side seats in a movie theater, stretched out of true proportion, curiously two-dimensional. He wore a white smock, and there were three narrow combs in the breast pocket. He carried a pair of scissors in one thin, sensitive-looking hand.

"How do you do?" he said to Carella, and he executed a half-bow, European in origin, American in execution. He turned to Hawes, took his hand, shook it, and again said, "How do you do?"

"They're from the police," Miss Marie said briskly, releasing Mr. Sam from any obligation to be polite, and then left the men alone.

"A woman named Claudia Davis was here on July seventh," Carella said. "Apparently she had her hair done by you. Can you tell us what you remember about her?"

"Miss Davis, Miss Davis," Mr. Sam said, touching his high forehead in an attempt at visual shorthand, trying to convey the concept of thought without having to do the accompanying brainwork. "Let me see, Miss Davis, Miss Davis."

"Yes."

"Yes, Miss Davis. A very pretty blonde."

"No," Carella said. He shook his head. "A brunette. You're thinking of the wrong person."

"No, I'm thinking of the right person," Mr. Sam said. He tapped his temple with one extended forefinger, another piece of visual abbreviation. "I remember. Claudia Davis. A blonde."

"A brunette," Carella insisted, and he kept watching Mr. Sam.

"When she left. But when she came, a blonde."

"What?" Hawes said.

"She was a blonde, a very pretty, natural blonde. It is rare. Natural blondness, I mean. I couldn't understand why she wanted to change the color."

"You dyed her hair?" Hawes asked.

"That is correct."

"Did she say *why* she wanted to be a brunette?"

"No, sir. I argued with her. I said, 'You have *beau*-tiful hair, I can do *mar*-velous things with this hair of yours. You are a *blonde*, my dear, there are drab women who come in here every day of the week and *beg* to be turned into blondes.' No. She would not listen. I dyed it for her."

Mr. Sam seemed to become offended by the idea all over again. He looked at the detectives as if they had been responsible for the stubbornness of Claudia Davis.

"What else did you do for her, Mr. Sam?" Carella asked.

"The dye, a cut, and a set. And I believe one of the girls gave her a facial and a manicure."

"What do you mean by a cut? Was her hair long when she came in here?"

"Yes, beautiful long blond hair. She wanted it cut. I cut it." Mr. Sam shook his head. "A pity. She looked terrible. I don't usually say this about someone I work on, but she walked out of here looking terrible. You would hardly recognize her as the same pretty blonde who came in not three hours before."

"Maybe that was the idea," Carella said.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Forget it. Thank you, Mr. Sam. We know you're busy."

In the street outside Hawes said, "You knew before we went in there, didn't you, Mr. Steve?"

"I suspected, Mr. Cotton, I suspected. Come on, let's get back to the squad."

14.

They kicked it around like a bunch of advertising executives. They sat in Lieutenant Byrnes' office and tried to find out how the cookie crumbled and which way the Tootsie rolled. They were just throwing out a life preserver to see if anyone grabbed at it, that's all. What they were doing, you see, was running up the flag to see if anyone saluted, that's all. The lieutenant's office was a four-window office because he was top man in this particular combine. It was a very elegant office. It had an electric fan all its own, and a big wide desk. It got cross ventilation from the street. It was really very pleasant. Well, to tell the truth, it was a pretty ratty office in which to be holding a top-level meeting, but it was the best the precinct had to offer. And after a while you got used to the chipping paint and the soiled walls and the bad lighting and the stench of urine from the men's room down the hall. Peter Byrnes didn't work for B.B.D. & O. He worked for the city. Somehow, there was a difference.

"I just put in a call to Irene Miller," Carella said. "I asked her to describe Claudia Davis to me, and she went through it all over again. Short dark hair, shy, plain. Then I asked her to describe the cousin, Josie Thompson." Carella nodded glumly. "Guess what?"

"A pretty girl," Hawes said. "A pretty girl with long blond hair."

"Sure. Why, Mrs. Miller practically spelled it out the first time we talked to her. It's all there in the report. She said they were like black and white in looks and personality. Black and white, sure. A brunette and a goddamn blonde!"

"That explains the yellow," Hawes said.

"What yellow?"

"Courtenoy. He said he saw a patch of yellow breaking the surface. He wasn't talking about her clothes, Steve. He was talking about her *hair*."

"It explains a lot of things," Carella said. "It explains why shy Claudia Davis was preparing for her European trip by purchasing Baby Doll nightgowns and Bikini bathing suits. And it explains why the undertaker up there referred to Claudia as a pretty girl. And it explains why our necropsy report said she was thirty when everybody talked about her as if she were much younger."

"The girl who drowned wasn't Josie, huh?" Meyer said. "You figure she was Claudia."

"Damn right I figure she was Claudia."

"And you figure she cut her hair afterward, and dyed it, and took her cousin's name, and tried to pass as her cousin until she could get out of the country, huh?" Meyer said.

"Why?" Byrnes said. He was a compact man with a compact bullet head and a chunky economical body. He did not like to waste time or words.

"Because the trust income was in Claudia's name. Because Josie didn't have a dime of her own."

"She could have collected on her cousin's insurance policy," Meyer said.

"Sure, but that would have been the end of it. The trust called for those stocks to be turned over to U.C.L.A. if Claudia died. A college, for God's sake! How do you suppose Josie felt about that? Look, I'm not trying to hang a homicide on her. I just think she took advantage of a damn good situation. Claudia was in that boat alone. When she fell over the side, Josie really tried to rescue her, no question about it. But she missed, and Claudia drowned. Okay. Josie went all to pieces, couldn't talk straight, crying, sobbing, real hysterical woman, we've seen them before. But came the dawn. And with the dawn, Josie began thinking. They were away from the city, strangers in a strange town. Claudia had drowned, but no one *knew* that she was Claudia. No one but Josie. She had no identification on her, remember? Her purse was in the car. Okay. If Josie identified her cousin correctly, she'd collect twenty-five grand on the insurance policy, and then all that stock would be turned over to the college, and that would be the end of the gravy train. But suppose, just suppose Josie told the police the girl in the lake was Josie Thompson? Suppose she said, 'I, Claudia Davis, tell you that girl who drowned is my cousin, Josie Thompson'?"

Hawes nodded. "Then she'd still collect on an insurance policy, and also fall heir to those fat security dividends coming in."

"Right. What does it take to cash a dividend check? A bank account, that's all. A bank account with an established signature. So all she had to do was open one, sign her name as Claudia Davis, and then endorse every dividend check that came in exactly the same way."

"Which explains the new account," Meyer said. "She couldn't use Claudia's old account because the bank undoubtedly knew both Claudia *and* her signature. So Josie had to forfeit the sixty grand at Highland Trust and start from scratch."

"And while she was building a new identity and a new fortune," Hawes said, "just to make sure Claudia's few friends forgot all about her, Josie was running off to Europe. She may have planned to stay there for years."

"It all ties in," Carella said. "Claudia had a driver's license. She was the one who drove the car away from Stewart City. But Josie had to hire a chauffeur to take her back."

"And would Claudia, who was so meticulous about money matters, have kept so many people waiting for payment?" Hawes said. "No, sir. That was Josie. And Josie was broke, Josie was waiting for that insurance policy to pay off so she could settle those debts and get the hell out of the country."

"Well, I admit it adds up," Meyer said.

Peter Byrnes never wasted words. "Who cashed that twenty-five thousand-dollar check for Josie?" he said.

There was silence in the room.

"Who's got that missing five grand?" he said.

There was another silence.

"Who *killed* Josie?" he said.

15.

Jeremiah Dodd of the Security Insurance Corporation, Inc., did not call until two days later. He asked to speak to Detective Carella, and when he got him on the phone, he said, "Mr. Carella, I've just heard from San Francisco on that check."

"What check?" Carella asked. He had been interrogating a witness to a knifing in a grocery store on Culver Avenue. The Claudia Davis or rather the Josie Thompson case was not quite yet in the Open File, but it was ready to be dumped there, and was truly the farthest thing from Carella's mind at the moment.

"The check we paid to Claudia Davis," Dodd said.

"Oh, yes. Who cashed it?"

"Well, there are two endorsements on the back. One was made by Claudia Davis, of course. The other was made by an outfit called Leslie Summers, Inc. It's a regular company stamp marked 'For Deposit Only' and signed by one of the officers."

"Have any idea what sort of a company that is?" Carella asked.

"Yes," Dodd said. "They handle foreign exchange."

"Thank you," Carella said.

He went there with Bert Kling later that afternoon. He went with Kling completely by chance and only because Kling was heading downtown to buy his girl friend a birthday gift and offered Carella a ride. When they parked the car, Kling asked, "How long will this take, Steve?"

"Few minutes, I guess."

"Want to meet me back here?"

"Well, I'll be at 720 Hall, Leslie Summers, Inc. If you're through before me, come on over."

"Okay, I'll see you." Kling said.

They parted on Hall Avenue without shaking hands. Carella found the street-level office of Leslie Summers, Inc., and walked in. A counter ran the length of the room, and there were several girls behind it. One of the girls was speaking to a customer in French and another was talking Italian to a man who wanted lire in exchange for dollars. A board behind the desk quoted the current exchange rate for countries all over the world. Carella got in line and waited. When he reached the counter, the girl who'd been speaking French said, "Yes, sir?"

"I'm a detective," Carella said. He opened his wallet to where his shield was pinned to the leather. "You cashed a check for Miss Claudia Davis sometime in July. An insurance-company check for twenty-five thousand dollars. Would you happen to remember it?"

"No, sir, I don't think I handled it."

"Would you check around and see who did, please?"

The girl held a brief consultation with the other girls, and then walked to a desk behind which sat a corpulent, balding man with a razor-thin mustache. They talked with each other for a full five minutes. The man kept waving his hands. The girl kept trying to explain about the insurance-company check. The bell over the front door sounded. Bert Kling came in, looked around, saw Carella, and joined him at the counter.

"All done?" Carella asked.

"Yeah, I bought her a charm for her bracelet. How about you?"

"They're holding a summit meeting," Carella said.

The fat man waddled over to the counter. "What is the trouble?" he asked Carella.

"No trouble. Did you cash a check for twenty-five thousand dollars?"

"Yes. Is the check no good?"

"It's a good check."

"It looked like a good check. It was an insurance-company check. The young lady waited while we called the company. They said it was bona fide and we should accept it. Was it a bad check?"

"No, no, it was fine."

"She had identification. It all seemed very proper."

"What did she show you?"

"A driver's license or a passport is what we usually require. But she had neither. We accepted her birth certificate. After all, we *did* call the company. Is the check no good?"

"It's fine. But the check was for twenty-five thousand, and we're trying to find out what happened to five thousand of . . ."

"Oh, yes. The francs."

"What?"

"She bought five thousand dollars' worth of French francs," the fat man said. "She was going abroad?"

"Yes, she was going abroad," Carella said. He sighed heavily. "Well, that's that, I guess."

"It all seemed very proper," the fat man insisted.

"Oh, it was, it was. Thank you. Come on, Bert."

They walked down Hall Avenue in silence.

"Beats me," Carella said.

"What's that, Steve?"

"This case." He sighed again. "Oh, what the hell!"

"Yeah, let's get some coffee. What was all that business about the francs?"

"She bought five thousand dollars' worth of francs," Carella said.

"The French are getting a big play lately, huh?" Kling said, smiling. "Here's a place. This look okay?"

"Yeah, fine." Carella pulled open the door of the luncheonette. "What do you mean, Bert?"

"With the francs."

"What about them?"

"The exchange rate must be very good."

"I don't get you."

"You know. All those francs kicking around."

"Bert, what the hell are you talking about?"

"Weren't you with me? Last Wednesday?"

"With you where?"

"The line-up. I thought you were with me."

"No, I wasn't," Carella said tiredly.

"Oh, well, that's why."

"That's why what? Bert, for the love of . . ."

"That's why you don't remember him."

"Who?"

"The punk they brought in on that burglary pickup. They found five grand in French francs in his apartment."

Carella felt as if he'd just been hit by a truck.

16.

It had been crazy from the beginning. Some of them are like that. The girl had looked black, but she was really white. They thought she was Claudia Davis, but she was Josie Thompson. And they had been looking for a murderer when all there happened to be was a burglar.

They brought him up from his cell where he was awaiting trial for Burglary One. He came up in an elevator with a police escort. The police van had dropped him off at the side door of the Criminal Courts Building, and he had entered the corridor under guard and been marched down through the connecting tunnel and into the building that housed the district attorney's office, and then taken into the elevator. The door of the elevator opened into a tiny room upstairs. The other door of the room was locked from the outside and a sign on it read NO ADMITTANCE. The patrolman who'd brought Ralph Reynolds up to the interrogation room stood with his back against the elevator door all the while the detectives talked to him, and his right hand was on the butt of his Police Special.

"I never heard of her," Reynolds said.

"Claudia Davis," Carella said. "Or Josie Thompson. Take your choice."

"I don't know either one of them. What the hell *is* this? You got me on a burglary rap, now you try to pull in

everything was ever done in this city?"

"Who said anything was done, Reynolds?"

"If nothing was done, why'd you drag me up here?"

"They found five thousand bucks in French francs in your pad, Reynolds. Where'd you get it?"

"Who wants to know?"

"Don't get snotty, Reynolds! Where'd you get that money?"

"A guy owed it to me. He paid me in francs. He was a French guy."

"What's his name?"

"I can't remember."

"You'd better start trying."

"Pierre something."

"Pierre what?" Meyer said.

"Pierre La Salle, something like that. I didn't know him too good."

"But he lent you five grand, huh?"

"Yeah."

"What were you doing on the night of August first?"

"Why? What happened on August first?"

"You tell us."

"I don't know what I was doing."

"Were you working?"

"I'm unemployed."

"You know what we mean!"

"No. What do you mean?"

"Were you breaking into apartments?"

"No."

"Speak up! Yes or no?"

"I said no."

"He's lying, Steve," Meyer said.

"Sure he is."

"Yeah, sure I am. Look, cop, you got nothing on me but Burglary One, if that. And that you gotta prove in court. So stop trying to hang anything else on me. You ain't got a chance."

"Not unless those prints check out," Carella said quickly.

"What prints?"

"The prints we found on the dead girl's throat," Carella lied.

"I was wearing . . . !"

The small room went as still as death.

Reynolds sighed heavily. He looked at the floor.

"You want to tell us?"

"No," he said. "Go to hell."

He finally told them. After twelve hours of repeated questioning he finally broke down. He hadn't meant to kill her, he said. He didn't even know anybody was in the apartment. He had looked in the bedroom, and the bed was empty. He hadn't seen her asleep in one of the chairs, fully dressed. He had found the French money in a big jar on one of the shelves over the sink. He had taken the money and then accidentally dropped the jar, and she woke up and came into the room and saw him and began screaming. So he grabbed her by the throat. He only meant to shut her up. But she kept struggling. She was very strong. He kept holding on, but only to shut her up. She kept struggling, so he had to hold on. She kept struggling as if . . . as if he'd really been trying to kill her, as if she didn't want to lose her life. But that was manslaughter, wasn't it? He wasn't trying to kill her. That wasn't homicide, was it?

"I didn't mean to kill her!" he

shouted as they took him into the elevator. "She began screaming! I'm not a killer! Look at me! Do I look like a killer?" And then, as the elevator began dropping to the basement, he shouted, "I'm a burglar!" as if proud of his profession, as if stating that he was something more than a common thief, a trained workman, a skilled artisan. "I'm not a killer! I'm a burglar!" he screamed. "I'm not a killer! I'm not a killer!" And his voice echoed down the elevator shaft as the car dropped to the basement and the waiting van.

They sat in the small room for several moments after he was gone.

"Hot in here," Meyer said.

"Yeah." Carella nodded.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Maybe he's right," Meyer said. "Maybe he's only a burglar."

"He stopped being that the minute he stole a life, Meyer."

"Josie Thompson stole a life, too."

"No," Carella said. He shook his head. "She only borrowed one. There's a difference, Meyer."

The room went silent.

"You feel like some coffee?" Meyer asked.

"Sure."

They took the elevator down and then walked out into the brilliant August sunshine. The streets were teeming with life. They walked into the human swarm, but they were curiously silent.

At last Carella said, "I guess I think she shouldn't be dead. I guess I think that someone who tried so hard to make a life shouldn't have had it taken away from her."

Meyer put his hand on Carella's shoulder. "Listen," he said earnestly. "It's a job. It's only a job."

"Sure," Carella said. "It's only a job." 87

THE FACES BY RICHARD MATHESON

DEAR PA:

I am sending you this note under Rex's collar because I got to stay here. I hope the note gets to you all right.

I couldn't deliver the tax letter you sent me with because the Widow Blackwell is killed. She is upstairs. I put her on her bed. She looks awful. I wish you would get the sheriff and the coronir Wilks.

Little Jim Blackwell, I don't know where he is right now. He is so scared he goes running around the house and hiding from me. He must have got awful scared by whoever killed his ma. He don't say a word. He just runs around like a scared rat. I see his eyes sometimes in the dark and then they are gone. They got no electric power here you know.

I came out toward sundown bringing that note. I rung the bell but there wasn't no answer so I pushed open the front door and looked in.

All the shades was down. And I heard someone running light in the front room and then feet running upstairs. I called around for the Widow but she didn't answer me.

I started upstairs and saw Jim looking down through the bannister posts. When he saw me looking at him, he run down the hall and I ain't seen him since.

I looked around the upstairs rooms. Finally, I went in the Widow Blackwell's room and there she was dead on the floor in a puddle of blood. Her throat was cut and her eyes was wide open and looking up at me. It was an awful sight.

I shut her eyes and searched around some and I found the razor. The Widow has all her clothes on so I figure it were only robbery that the killer meant.

Well, Pa, please come out quick with the sheriff and the coronir Wilks. I will stay here and watch to see that Jim don't go running out of the house and maybe get lost in the woods. But come as fast as you can because I don't like sitting here with her up

there like that and Jim sneaking around in the dark house.

LUKE

DEAR GEORGE:

We just got back from your sister's house. We haven't told the papers yet so I'll have to be the one to let you know.

I sent Luke out there with a property tax note and he found your sister murdered. I don't like to be the one to tell you but somebody has to. The sheriff and his boys are scouring the countryside for the killer. They figure it was a tramp or something. She wasn't raped though and, far as we can tell, nothing was stolen.

What I mean more to tell you about is little Jim.

That boy is fixing to die soon from starvation and just plain scaredness. He won't eat nothing. Sometimes, he gulps down a piece of bread or a piece of candy but as soon as he starts to chewing his face gets all twisted and he gets violent sick and throws up. I don't understand it at all.

Luke found your sister in her room with her throat cut ear to ear. Coronor Wilks says it was a strong, steady hand that done it because the cut is deep and sure. I am terrible sorry to be the one to tell you all this but I think it is better you know. The funeral will be in a week.

Luke and I had a long time rounding up the boy. He was like lightning. He ran around in the dark and squealed like a rat. He showed his teeth at us when we'd corner him with a lantern. His skin is all white and the way he rolls his eyes back and foams at his mouth is something awful to see.

We finally caught him. He bit us and squirmed around like a eel. Then he got all stiff and it was like carrying a two-by-four, Luke said.

We took him into the kitchen and tried to give him something to eat. He wouldn't take a bite. He gulped down some milk like he felt guilty about it. Then, in a second, his face twists and he draws back his lips and the milk comes out.

He kept trying to run away from us. Never a single word out of him. He just squeaks and mutters like a monkey talking to itself.

We finally carried him upstairs to put him to bed. He froze soon as we touched him and I thought his eyes would fall out he opened them so wide. His jaw fell slack and he stared at us like we was boogie men or trying to slice open his throat like his ma's.

He wouldn't go in his room. He screamed and twisted in our hands like a fish. He braced his feet against the wall and tugged and pulled and scratched. We had to slap his face and then his eyes got big and he got like a board again and we carried him in his room.

When I took off his clothes I got a shock like I haven't had in years, George. That boy is all scars and bruises on his back and chest like someone has strung him up and tortured him with pliers or hot iron or God knows what all. I got a downright chill seeing that. I know they

said the widow wasn't the same in her head after her husband died but I can't believe she done this. It is the work of a crazy person.

Jim was sleepy but he wouldn't shut his eyes. He kept looking around the ceiling and the window and his lips kept moving like he was trying to talk. He was moaning kind of low and shaky when Luke and I went out in the hall.

No sooner did we leave him than he's screaming at the top of his voice and thrashing in his bed like someone was strangling him. We rushed in and I held the lantern high but we couldn't see anything. I thought the boy was sick with fear and seeing things.

Then, as if it was meant to happen, the lantern ran out of oil and all of a sudden we saw white faces staring at us from the walls and ceiling and the window.

It was a shaky minute there, George, with the kid screaming out his lungs and twisting on his bed but never getting up. And Luke trying to find the door and me feeling for a match but trying to look at those horrible faces at the same time.

Finally I found a match and I got it lit and we couldn't see the faces any more, just part of one on the window.

I sent Luke down to the car for some oil and when he come back we lit the lantern again and looked at the window and saw that the face was painted on it so's to light up in the dark. Same thing for the faces on the walls and the ceiling. It was enough to scare a man out of half his wits to think of anybody doing that inside a little boy's room.

We took him to another room and put him down to bed. When we left him he was squirming in his sleep and muttering words we couldn't understand. I left Luke in the hall outside the room to watch. I went and looked around the house some more.

In the Widow's room I found a whole shelf of psychology books. They was all marked in different places. I looked in one place and it told about a thing how they can make rats go crazy by making them think there is food in a place when there isn't. And another one about how they can make a dog lose its appetite and starve to death by hitting big pieces of pipe together at the same time when the dog is trying to eat.

I guess you know what I think. But it is so terrible I can hardly believe it. I mean that Jim might have got so crazy that he cut her. He is so small I don't see how he could.

You are her only living kin, George, and I think you should do something about the boy. We don't want to put him in a orphan home. He is in no shape for it. That is why I am telling you all about him so you can judge.

There was another thing. I played a record on a phonograph in the boy's room. It sounded like wild animals all making terrible noises and even louder than them was a terrible high laughing.

That is about all, George. We will

let you know if the sheriff finds the one who killed your sister because no one really believes that Jim could have done it. I wish you would take the boy and try to fix him up.

Until I hear,

SAM DAVIS

DEAR SAM:

I got your letter and am more upset than I can say.

I knew for a long time that my sister was mentally unbalanced after her husband's death but I had no idea in the world she was so far gone.

You see, when she was a girl she fell in love with Phil. There was never anyone else in her life. The sun rose and descended on her love for him. She was so jealous that, once, because he had taken another girl to a party, she crashed her hands through a window and nearly bled to death.

Finally, Phil married her. There was never a happier couple, it seemed. She did anything and everything for him. He was her whole life.

When Jim was born I went to see her at the hospital. She told me she wished it had been born dead because she knew that the boy meant so much to Phil and she hated to have Phil want anything but her.

She never was good to Jim. She always resented him. And, that day, three years ago, when Phil drowned saving Jim's life, she went out of her mind. I was with her when she heard about it. She ran into the kitchen and got a carving knife and took it running through the streets, trying to find Jim so she could kill him. She finally fainted in the road and we took her home.

She wouldn't even look at Jim for a month. Then she packed up and took him to that house in the woods. Since then I never saw her.

You saw yourself, the boy is terrified of everyone and everything. Except one person. My sister planned that. Step by step she planned it—God help me for never realizing it before. In a whole, monstrous world of horrors she built around that boy she left him trust and need for only one person—*her*. She was Jim's only shield against those horrors. She knew that, when she died, Jim would go completely mad because there wouldn't be anyone in the world he could turn to for comfort.

I think you see now why I say there isn't any murderer.

Just bury her quick and send the boy to me. I'm not coming to the funeral.

GEORGE BARNES

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Continued from Back Cover

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