

MANHUNT

A man in a white jacket and shorts is running on a beach, looking up and to the right. The background is a blurred beach scene with waves and sand.

WORLD'S MOST POPULAR CRIME-FICTION MAGAZINE

JUNE, 1962

35 CENTS

JAMES ULLMAN

DICK MOORE

C. B. GILFORD

MICHAEL ZUROY

LAWRENCE BLOCK

HOLLIS GALE

EVERY STORY NEW!

Cover by Maurice Landre

CONTENTS

NOVELETTE

THE CRIME BROKER *by Steve Frazee* 104

SPECIAL FEATURE

MANHUNT'S GUN RACK 61

SHORT STORIES

MOTIVE TO KILL *by James Ullman* 1SUCKER BAIT *by Norm Kent* 6FLY BY NIGHT *by Dick Moore* 18THE GREATEST *by Hollis Gale* 32ACCORDING TO PLAN *by Seymour Richin* 37STAY OF EXECUTION *by Al Martinez* 49FAMILY ARGUMENT *by Neal Curtis* 57THE FALLEN COP *by Robert Anthony* 62CRY WOLF! *by C. B. Gilford* 76FROZEN STIFF *by Lawrence Block* 87PRICE OF LIFE *by Michael Zuroy* 93MICHAEL ST. JOHN, *Publisher*GERALD ADAMS, *Art Director*JOHN UNDERWOOD, *Editor*JOE SHORE, *Advertising Rep.*J. PROSKE, *Associate Editor*

MANHUNT VOLUME 10, NUMBER 3, June 1962. Single copies 35 cents. Subscriptions, \$4.00 or 12 issues in the United States and Possessions; elsewhere \$5.00 (in U. S. Funds) for 12 issues. Published bi-monthly by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc., 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. Telephone MU 7-6623. Second Class Postage paid at New York, N. Y. and at additional mailing offices. The entire contents of this issue are copyright 1962 by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc., under the International Copyright Convention. All rights reserved under Inter-American Copyright Convention. Title registered U. S. Pat. Office. Reproduction or use without express permission of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Postage must accompany manuscripts and drawings if return is desired, but no responsibility will be assumed for unsolicited materials. Manuscripts and art work should be sent to Manhunt, 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and or institutions appearing in this magazine and those of any living or dead person or institution is intended and any similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in U. S. A.

A killer prowled: A psycho of some sort who killed women — young, beautiful women.

MOTIVE TO KILL

BY
JAMES
ULLMAN



RUTH stood naked, viewing herself in the big mirror over her dresser. She turned on her heels and peered critically over her shoulder; turned again until she faced the mirror once more, hands on her broad hips.

Well now, she thought. Maybe my figure isn't perfect. But it will do. I'm as well-formed as most girls I know. I'm taller, but many men

like a big girl. My breasts are large. My body can still attract a man.

She ventured a coquettish smile, pathetically aware inside that this contortion of her homely features was slightly ridiculous.

But perhaps the man—whoever he would turn out to be—would not think her ridiculous. Perhaps he would not notice her irregular nose and the lines under her receding chin; would not deduce her true age, and would believe her when she said she was just turning twenty-five.

She held her smile bravely.

Out of the corner of her eye she saw, but did not comprehend, the import of the black headline on the newspaper she had tossed to the floor:

**"POLICE STILL SEEK
THRILL SLAYER."**

Ruth had been to this place before. **THE BLUE DIAMOND**, glittered the flickering neon sign above her. A bar and dance hall.

Perhaps tonight would be the night. Perhaps tonight she would meet a man who would understand, who ultimately would want to marry her.

The centuries-old adolescent who took tickets indulged in his private version of humor as she walked in: "Back again, honey? Hope you score."

It was a warm night and Ruth breezed past the checkroom and walked straight to the ballroom.

She glanced briefly at the mob lining the dance floor and then approached the bar. She was lucky and found an empty stool.

"Bourbon and water," she told the bartender. "Water on the side." It was the best way to order in this place. The only way a girl could be sure of getting all the bourbon she needed.

When the glasses came she sipped straight bourbon slowly, eyes narrowed, enjoying the raw taste of the liquor as it burned down her throat.

Lord, it was good. Almost as good as the first drink, the one she'd had when she got to her apartment from the office. The first and the second and then the third, that is.

She hadn't bothered to eat supper.

Three straight bourbons. A change of clothes. And then she came to this place.

She hardly heard the men beside her. They were wrapped up in their own conversation. And besides, both had the look of men who had come with women of their own.

"Only four blocks from here," one of the men said. "That's where they found the last body. On Holiday Street. Her throat slit, like the others."

"He must get a bang out of it," the man's companion observed.

"Four in the last two months. That's what the paper said. All in this part of town. Four girls. He probably picks 'em up somewhere,

romances 'em a little, and then kills 'em. A psycho."

Ruth didn't listen. She downed the bourbon and ordered another.

"Excuse me."

The voice was deep, vibrant, masculine. A stranger's voice. But an exciting voice.

Ruth looked up, an automatic smile on her lips.

"Excuse me," he went on. "I saw you sitting here alone. I've seen you here before. I hope you don't think I'm forward. But I've wanted to meet you. Can I buy you a drink? No strings attached?"

"I guess so," Ruth said. She tried to appear sophisticated, blase, like a character in a movie. She hoped he didn't notice that her hands trembled.

He slid onto a bar stool beside her. He was her own age, probably, about thirty-five. He wore a brown suit and a brown tie with a gold clip at just the right position. His dark hair lay unruly and unencumbered, very appealing, she thought. His face was plain and square, his lips almost bloodless, and he gazed at her with grey, unblinking eyes shrouded by long lashes, almost like a girl's.

"Two more straight bourbons," the man said to the bartender. He turned to Ruth and smiled. "My name is Harry. Harry Borton. I sell cars. I don't make a heck of a lot of money, but it's a living, and it's fun."

"I'm Ruth," she said. "Ruth Hoffmann."

"What do you do, Ruth?"

"Oh, not much. I'm an office girl. A file girl."

"Do you come here often?"

"Once in a while."

The new drinks arrived. Ruth grasped hers firmly, raised it to her lips, sipped, and smiled at Harry Borton.

"Once in a while," she repeated. "Thanks for the drink, Harry."

"Drink up," Harry said, raising his own glass, "and we'll dance."

So just like in the movies, they danced. And as they danced, Harry's hands became familiar, possessive. Ruth had been here a dozen times before but until this night she had never really heard the music. Never really appreciated it. But dancing with Harry Borton, she appreciated it.

"Please," she whispered, "people might be watching us."

"Let them," Harry replied, knowing full well that nobody in the place would pay any attention.

"Harry," she said, "I don't want you to get the wrong idea."

Grinning, he broke away from her. But he held her arm.

"Where are you from?" he asked. "I'll bet it's not from the city."

"You're right," she admitted. "I'm from Bloomington. Bloomington, Illinois."

"Well, come on, Bloomington, I'll buy you another drink."

She needed that other drink. She needed it very much.

Harry found them a quiet spot at the end of the bar. They downed their drinks quickly.

A moment later Harry bought her another still.

"Listen," Harry said, leaning forward, gazing intently at her, "Ruth, please listen. This isn't a line. But there's something special about you. I really like you."

Ruth stared at him with mock coyness.

"You think I'm beautiful?"

He was disarmingly frank.

"Not in the way most people would think. No. No, you're not. Some people might even call you unbeautiful. But to me, you're beautiful. Something about the way you carry yourself, the way you look at people. The goodness in you, the warmth and love in your eyes. Yes, I do think you're beautiful."

"Kidder," she said. But she didn't laugh. She smiled thoughtfully.

They walked to his apartment, which was four blocks from the dance hall. Ruth was delightfully drunk by now. Harry held her arm, tight, as though he owned her. Ruth enjoyed that.

Masterfully, he led her up the stairs to the building's vestibule. He released her for a moment while he fumbled for a key. He was so serious about the task that Ruth had to laugh.

"What's so funny," he demanded.

"You," she said. "You're funny."

He managed to get the key into the lock and to open the door. He took her arm again.

"Quiet," he warned. "I got the basement apartment and it's sound-proofed, but the landlord lives on the first floor and he don't like noise at night.

They tip-toed down the stairs to another door. Harry had the key ready this time. He opened the door quickly and they entered his apartment.

"Cozy!" Ruth exclaimed. "Harry, it's real cozy down here. How nice you fixed it up!"

They stood in the living room, lined with dark red drapes, furnished with expensive, tasteful pieces. The pen drawings on the wall—drawings of women—were unashamedly erotic.

"My friends kid me," Harry said modestly. "They say I should have been an interior decorator."

"Harry, you SHOULD have been. This is marvelous."

"Sit down and relax," Harry said, motioning toward the sofa. "I'll fix us a drink."

"Wonderful idea."

She settled in deep cushions. She heard Harry in the kitchen, opening the refrigerator. She picked up a magazine from the coffee table and thumbed through it. She didn't read any of the words but the pictures were all drawings of near-naked women.

Then Harry was back, offering

her a tall glass, his coat off, his tie loosened, his shirtsleeves rolled up.

"You'll like this," Harry said. "I invented it."

He sat down beside her, a drink of his own in his hand. She sipped.

"Good," she pronounced.

"Gin. It's really best in this weather."

"Very good," she said, and she drank more.

Harry put his glass down untouched. He slipped his arm around Ruth's shoulder.

"You know," he said, "you're really a very brave girl."

"Me brave? Why?"

"The thrill killer. Haven't you been reading in the newspapers about him?"

"I never read the papers," she said. "And anyhow, you don't look like a killer to me. I'm not worried."

His grip tightened.

"Maybe you should be," he said, smiling at her.

"Do your worst, then," she invited, putting her glass on the coffee table.

He put his glass beside hers. Then he leaned forward and they kissed. He slipped his hand under her skirt.

"Fresh," she said lightly. They kissed again. . . .

Eyes wide open, Ruth lay in bed beside him, listening to the heavy

rasp of his breath.

No, Harry, she thought, you're not the one. You don't really love me. I can tell. You're like the others. All you want is my body for a night. An easy pick-up, and then you'll forget me and go looking for another homely girl alone.

You won't have any trouble finding one, either. There are thousands like me in the city. All easy pickings for you, Harry. So sleep on.

She pushed the covers aside and moved naked across the room to the chair where she had hurriedly dumped her clothes an hour earlier. She dressed quickly. She didn't worry about Harry. He wouldn't wake up for a while. His last drink had been drugged. He would sleep like a baby for hours.

She was at the door now, Harry's keys in her purse, where she fumbled for the knife. It would be easy. Like the other times. She would lurk in the shadows until a young woman came along. A beautiful young woman.

And for one glorious moment, while the victim squirmed and pleaded, Ruth's strong arm encircling her throat, Ruth would have her revenge on all young women who were beautiful as Ruth had never been beautiful.

And then she would return to spend the remainder of the night with her man-thing alibi, Harry.



SUCKER BAIT

"He waved his fork like it was a sword and as if he was one of them knights of the roundtable or something. Except that you'd never fit a guy that huge into one of them metal suits."

BY
NORM KENT

WE HAD motel unit number 17; the best accommodations at the plush, ultra-modern lakeshore resort in northern Wisconsin. The young, well-stacked blonde named Dorrine Roberts occupied unit 11, so it wasn't too far for the boss to hike.

"Just far enough to get you in real trouble, Mr. Bierdham," I muttered, holding his sharp, expensive suit coat. "That guy who calls himself Fred Roberts can be rough."

Mr. Lloyd Bierdham eased his portly bulk into the coat and smiled, turning toward me while he hunched his bullish shoulders to ad-



just the set of the coat. "Joseph, my lad, you are too much of a worrier," he advised in that impressively-rumbling voice of his.

To look at the genial, white-haired guy with the bulbous, red-veined beak stuck in the middle of a fleshy, round mug below his bright, friendly blue eyes, you'd think you was looking at Santa Claus after a shave. He looked like a soft touch; like one of those fat slobs with fat bank accounts who'd ooze to the ground in a quivering coma if they had a gun pointed at them. Even an empty, rusted old relic minus a hammer, like the rod I'd used.

I'm Joe Jarrett. That's my real monicker. I've had plenty of others. The first time I spotted Mr. Lloyd Bierdham was when I was prowling the streets in Chicago after taking a fall for armed assault and doing my second term as a guest of the state.

Broke, hungry, hunting for an easy score, I was shuffling past this crowded, well-lighted eating joint when this chubby, white-haired geezer waddled over to the cashier to pay his tab. I could see good enough through the window to know that the bundle of bills crammed in his brown leather wallet would keep me from some mission flophouse for at least a month.

So, figuring it was just the set-up I'd been hoping to locate, I waylaid the well-dressed, harmless-looking fat guy when he came ambling past he alley I was in.

"This is a gun pokin' you in the back," I growled, sounding as tough and dangerous as I knew how. Like I said, it wasn't much of a gat—not even much good for slugging people with because one solid lick would have sent the pieces flying. Still, he didn't know that. It was the best, most deadly rod that money could buy as far as he was concerned!

I keep trying to think how he did it. I guess I'll never understand. One second he was marching meekly into the recesses of that lonely, shadow-shrouded alley. The next, I was slammed against a brick wall, gasping for air, pinned so tight by his plentiful poundage that I couldn't even breathe, let alone squirm away and run!

I didn't have the gun, either. He did. Rammed between my collarbones. "It—don't shoot, Mister!" I wheezed. "I never pack a—loaded rod! Someone could—get hurt—that way!"

"Well, in that case, I'll just pull the trigger," he said pleasantly, his voice deep and unruffled. He gave me a couple seconds to scream out in protest. When I didn't, he hefted the gun and pocketed it. "Let's go where the light is better," he said. He stepped back and I nearly collapsed, eagerly sucking air into my grateful lungs.

That was how I met Mr. Lloyd Bierdham. He took me back to the same restaurant I'd seen him in. He had another helping of dessert and

coffee while I gobbled the steak, french fries, vegetable and salad he ordered for me. Don't ask me why he bothered. He could have had the law put me away again; most guys would have.

After I told him all there was to tell, he offered me a job! Just like that! He was district salesmanager for an outfit that manufactured construction machinery and equipment. Before that, he'd been lots of places, working at lots of jobs, mostly as a sales executive. But, I didn't learn about his yen for action and danger until later, or about what a ham he was as an amateur actor, either.

"You have to be kidding about that job proposition!" I said, giving him a suspicious once-over after I finished eating. "A hundred a week draw against the size of commissions you're talking about don't get offered to a guy like me!"

"We need a dependable, aggressive salesman to call on the contractors in this territory," Mr. Bierdham said. He was looking at the rusty relic of a rod he'd taken from me. He chuckled, slipping the useless gat back to me beneath the booth. "You are aggressive, Mr. Jarrett. I can attest to that! Are you dependable?"

He not only looked like a clean-shaved Santa—he acted like one. I pegged him as a nut; a fanatic sort of a religious reformer or something. But I looked him square in the eyes and said I'd try.

Which I did. I made the rounds with him the next week. Nights, in the hotel rooms we bunked in together, I read up on the products the company manufactured. At the end of the month, I got a paycheck!

Mr. Bierdham got something, too. A memo from the front office. They'd had personnel run a routine check on me. That ended my job before I even got started selling. They didn't politely request my discharge. They demanded it. Immediately or sooner.

A two-page letter to management brought a telegram repeating the command to sack me. I told Mr. Bierdham to let it drop. "You think this is the first legit job I've lost?" I said. "Thanks for goin' to bat for me the way you did, but now—"

"Now, I am becoming perturbed," Mr. Bierdham said. He was standing at the hotel room windows, rolls of fat folding and unfolding like an accordian while he did his nightly deep-breathing and bending exercises in his polka-dot shorts and undershirt.

I told him not to, but the next morning, he phoned the home office of the company long-distance, and insisted on speaking personally to the vice-president he worked for. I winced, hearing him blast his superior for being unfair and biased. I waggled my head and shook my hands, trying to shut him up when he told the big-shot on the other end of the line that he most definitely was not going to fire me.

Even before Mr. Bierdham lowered the receiver, I'd heard the hysterical shriek of the Veep, telling Mr. Bierdham to consider himself as well as that ex-convict person unemployed.

"Ah, well, it was time for a change, anyway," said my boss, his round, ruddy mug jovial and his blue eyes twinkling good-humoredly. "Joseph, we deserve a vacation, don't you agree?"

He took my startled, "Huh?" for approval, I guess, because the next day we were in his Cadillac, cruising northward through small towns, past green farmlands and woods, and the day after that we arrived at this ritzy, scenic Wisconsin resort.

There was a medium-tall guy with grey hair and the grim, intelligent face of a successful businessman stalking away from the reservation desk when I walked into the knotty-pine lodge building with Mr. Bierdham. The thin, wavy-haired reservations clerk smiled respectfully at the boss when he asked for the best accommodations available.

"Mr. Henry Carbell has just vacated unit number 17," said the clerk while Mr. Bierdham signed the register.

"Carbell? Oh, yes. I thought he looked familiar," Mr. Bierdham replied. "Hank Carbell, the president of Carbell Consolidated Oils."

Immediately, the clerk's respectful brown eyes acquired even more interest behind the dark-rimmed

glasses he wore. "Oh, do you know Mr. Carbell, sir?"

"Only slightly, young man. I helped to elect him at the stockholder's meeting several years ago. Will you have someone take our luggage to our rooms, please?"

"Certainly, sir! Might I inquire how long you and your valet will be our guests, Mr. Bierdham?"

Valet! Me? I was all duded up in a dark blue suit; more sharp and neat than I'd ever been in my life, and the stupid stringbean behind the counter took me for a servant, yet! I muttered angrily as I stepped forward, opening my mouth to read him off. Then, Mr. Bierdham casually planted his left shoe on my foot and applied some of his massive weight. I was too busy moaning to say anything.

The three-room cabin we followed a uniformed bellboy into was like a miniature palace. Really ultra-ultra, if you get me. After the twerp grinned, thanking Mr. Bierdham for the five-spot tip, I waited until the kid who'd carried in our luggage left, then I hurried over to ask just how we were going to pay for everything.

"You told me there's only a couple C notes between you and bankruptcy, Mr. Bierdham! Then, out there in the lodge, you talk as if the guy who used to be in here is workin' for you! And, slipping a five-buck tip to the bellhop! Excuse me for sayin' so, Mr. Bierdham, but now I'm sure you're nuts!"

"I told the foppish young clerk the truth," Mr. Bierdham said, not the least bit annoyed or worried. "Several years ago, I did attend the Carbell Consolidated Oil Corporation stockholder's meeting. True, my holdings consisted only of six shares with a par value of less than fifty dollars apiece, but nevertheless, I did cast my vote for Mr. Carbell and I helped defeat the unscrupulous charlatan who was vying for control of the company."

"Yeah, but the clerk thinks you're even richer than that guy, Carbell or whatever his name is! And, when the bellhop spreads it around that you're a big tipper, all the other people around here will think the same thing!"

"You have to spend money to make money, Joseph, my boy."

"But we ain't got money to spend!"

"Will you mind being assumed to be my faithful manservant, Joseph? The notion hadn't occurred to me until that clerk suggested it, but it will heighten the impression I'm trying to create."

I stared at Lloyd Bierdham. I never called him anything except mister, anyway. He was a great guy. I owed him lots. I didn't know my own old man and I'd been on my own since I was twelve. He was the closest I'd ever come to having a friend, too. In my book, Mr. Bierdham was a fat version of Superman with white hair, of Santa without the whiskers.

"You're the boss, boss. We'll probably both wind up in the clink when it comes time to pay the tab here, but I'm with you," I said, sighing as I plunked down into one of the fancy chairs.

"Spoken nobly, Joseph! To ease your troubled mind, allow me to explain our purpose for this, uh, elaborate masquerade." He ambled over to park his ponderous package on the beige sofa. I was relieved that it didn't break down.

I listened. His idea was that there were important, influential people staying at the resort. That he'd get on friendly terms with some successful character like the guy who'd had number 17 before we did, and line up a pair of new jobs for us.

I didn't know. It sounded good, the way he told it, but persuasive and brainy though Mr. Bierdham was, I sure had my doubts.

Three days later, when the beautiful blonde who bulged so gorgeously in all the right places in the jet black bathing suit she was wearing at the beach started giving my boss the business with her admiring, innocently-shining blue eyes, I thought she must be suffering a sun-stroke, or something.

Mr. Bierdham was lolling in a chair placed on the sloping sands leading down to the lake. The blonde, sprawled on a blanket, soaking up a tan she didn't need to improve her nicely-revealed complexion, must have struck up a conversation with him while I was

splashing around in the water between the pier and the raft.

Her name was Dorrine Roberts, so Mr. Bierdham informed me later while he dressed to meet her for dinner that evening. I scowled at my swarthy puss in the mirror, running a comb through my still-damp shock of black hair.

"Why would a chick young enough to be your daughter give you the come-on if she didn't have you pegged as a well-heeled play-boy?" I muttered, wandering over to take his tent-sized white shirt from a hanger and hand it to him.

"Miss Roberts was with a stocky, decidedly unsavory-looking man in the bar, yesterday," Mr. Bierdham remarked, taking the shirt. "The man has close-cropped, dirty brown hair. He reminded me of a badly-dissipated teddy bear, Joseph. I believe he inhabits unit 10, the rooms adjacent to the fetching blonde damsel's cabin."

"You want I should take a look at him?"

"Yes. Preferably without exposing yourself to him. I'm well aware that Miss Dorrine Roberts is far from being the demure, clean-living American girl she portrays, Joseph. And equally aware that, to borrow from your vocabulary, there is something 'fishy' about her rapt adoration toward me."

I grinned, opening the door for him a few minutes later when he left to keep his date with the babe. I kept out of sight, watching the

door to motel unit 11 open and the blonde wearing a pretty dark green frock latch onto Mr. Bierdham's arm. Even in a dress, she had a shape that was money in the bank! I timed my ogling orbs to the graceful sway of her lushly-curved hips as they headed toward the main lodge and if a guy could be jailed for what he was thinking I'd have been behind bars for life.

Stationing myself against the trunk of a giant jack pine not far from the cabin the blonde occupied, I kept watching the next unit, waiting for a peek at the character who had been with the dame in the tap room the day before, according to my boss.

It must have been close to an hour later when I spotted Fred Nieno. He sure tallied with Mr. Bierdham's description; hefty build, crew-cut brown hair, mean, piggish eyes and a disposition to match. Yeah, he was a dissipated teddy bear, all right. The kind of grizzly I wanted no part of!

"I tell you that character was in state pen the last time I saw him! If he's hooked up with the blonde, you can just bet they've got you picked as a sucker and that they're gonna try and take you!"

Mr. Bierdham nodded without breaking the rhythm of his deep-breathing exercises. I'd expected that he'd at least be surprised by the news I gave him when he returned from his evening with Dorrine Roberts. Me? I was scared.

"Joseph, will you get that small bottle of pepsin pills from my suitcase?" Mr. Bierdham, having completed the deep-breathing bit, was now beginning his nightly series of knee-bends. He burped gently as I obligingly located the bottle filled with gaudy pink pellets and shook out one of the pills.

I carried it over, along with a glass of water. I took the empty glass after Mr. Bierdham abandoned his exercises to down the large pink pellet and chase it with the water. "Too much to eat again, huh?" I grumbled.

"And, to drink, Joseph. Miss Roberts proved so charmingly-distracting that I fear I over-indulged," said the boss. "Now, to return to a more serious subject, I believe you are right, my boy. Dorrine hinted that she was, ah, susceptible to older men. If I'm not mistaken, she will ultimately manage to lure me into her, uh, bedroom."

"Sure! The old badger game," I said, snapping my fingers. I stared at him. "What else could it be? She and her partner are gonna work the fix on you, thinking you're loaded with dough!"

Mr. Bierdham nodded, thoughtfully caressing his bulbous red beak as he waddled around the living room carpet. "Our stay has not resulted in the rewarding contacts and potentials for new positions I had hoped for."

"At thirty bucks a day times a week, that's the bankroll," I said.

"Let's settle up and check out of here in the morning. There ain't nothing here for us but trouble."

For a while I thought he saw it that way, too. Particularly after I nosed around the next day and learned that Henry Carbell, the big-shot oil company president, had also been on intimate terms with the babe who called herself Dorrine Roberts and that he'd only stayed half the length of time his reservation was for.

"Add it' up, yourself!" I told Mr. Bierdham while we were at the beach, watching a trio of girls in bathing suits water-skiing behind a cruiser that belonged to the lodge. "They must have clipped Carbell for plenty! Now, they figure you're ripe for the same sort of touch!"

"To think that a lovely, guileless-looking girl such as Dorrine would use her magnificent young body for so wicked a purpose," Mr. Bierdham said sadly. He placed his pudgy hand on my arm. I looked at him. "Speaking of Miss Roberts, she is walking toward us, Joseph. No don't look. Just leave, please," he said quietly.

I left. Sneaking a squint over my shoulder as I hiked away from the beach, I saw that the blonde was wearing a pale blue halter and an abbreviated matching skirt; a playsuit they call rigs like that. The way her superb set of breasts put the bra to work and the way her tanned legs and thighs followed enticingly beneath the short, pleated

blue skirt, I couldn't think of anything I'd rather do than—well, play!

We didn't leave the resort that day. Or the next. And then the boss got himself invited to unit 11. I don't know if he did the propositioning or if Dorrine whispered coyly into his small, delicate pinkish ears, shyly suggesting a session of hanky-panky for that evening, but anyway, Mr. Bierdham was going.

"You understand the, uh, arrangements, don't you, Joseph?" he asked, preparing to mosey forth to keep the date with Dorrine Roberts. Even after I'd found out from the reservations clerk that Fred Nieno, the rugged hood occupying unit 10, was registered as Mr. Fred Roberts, supposedly the blonde doll's brother, the boss wouldn't be talked out of the pre-arranged party.

"I understand," I mumbled gloomily. "I don't like, but I understand. It's too damn risky, boss. This guy pretending to be the babe's big brother always packs a heater—and his gun works!"

"You are too much of a worrier," Mr. Bierdham said again. "You said, yourself, that Fred Nieno, alias Fred Roberts is only a two-bit thug; that he's only tough on the surface with a yard-wide yellow streak on his interior."

"Yeah, but you might not be able to scratch through the surface!" I mumbled after him, watching

glumly as he pointed his sportily-clad bulk in the direction of the motel unit where the blonde was waiting for him.

All I could do was wait, sitting next to the phone on the stand beside the desk in the living room. I picked up a magazine. Every few minutes, I checked my watch. It was close to eleven o'clock at night when he'd left. I could almost see the blonde smiling seductively as she tugged him into her motel rooms. She probably was wearing some sort of sheer negligee wrapped carelessly around those gorgeous curves, doing her best to arouse the boss to a fever pitch. I didn't know about Mr. Bierdham, but my boiling point has always been damn low!

It was past midnight when the door burst open and Fred Nieno charged in! I was so surprised that I just sat there in the chair beside the phone, gaping at him. He was white and pasty-looking. Trembling like a hop-head who'd gone too long between fixes.

"The pills! Get them special pills!" he screamed at me, grabbing the lapels of my dark blue suit coat. "Come on, come on! You want that hunk of blubber you work for to croak?"

This wasn't part of what I'd expected. I was supposed to get a phone call. I blinked, trying to bat his frantically-twisting paws aside as he hauled me out of the chair. He was one real scared hood.

"What you talking about?" I growled. "And, what's the idea bustin' in here like your tail was afire, Nieno?"

"Hey! I know you! Wasn't you —"

"Yeah, we graduated from the same finishing school," I said, finally getting away from him.

"Well, never mind that, now! Listen, the fat slob you work for is dyin'! You got some heart medicine?" He was dancing around on his toes and licking his lips while his mean, piggish eyes bulged in their sockets. I never seen a guy so bad with the jitters.

He came close to carrying me all the way back up the line to the motel unit where the blonde and Mr. Bierdham were shacked up. I had the pills in my hand. When he hustled me into the bedroom, I stared at the scared-looking blonde who was bending anxiously over, trying to slap color into the boss's flabby cheeks.

Dorrine Roberts looked great in nothing. Even with just a rear view, I was impressed by her beautiful build. Fred Nieno didn't seem to appreciate the tanned, tantalizing chick who was supposed to be his sister, though. And, he didn't let me look long enough to fully appreciate her unfrocked frame, either. He shoved her aside and pulled me over to stand above Mr. Bierdham who was propped against the wall, clad only in his undershirt and polka-dot green and tan shorts.

"Give him the medicine! Don't just stand there!" Fred Nieno wailed. "Bring a glass of water, Dorrine! G'wan! Wiggle your fanny before this guy stops breathin'!" he snapped hoarsely, watching me unscrew the bottle and dump a big pink pill into the palm of my left hand.

Mr. Bierdham moaned. His eyes fluttered weakly open. His voice was feeble and strained as he recognized me. "My—pills, Joseph!" he pleaded, clutching piteously at where his heart was buried beneath thick layers of flesh.

"H—here's the water!" quavered the blonde, thrusting a glass into my hand and a conical, creamy breast almost into my face. I damn near dropped the glass!

"They—tried to blackmail—me, Joseph," gargled Mr. Bierdham after swallowing the pill. Some of the water from the glass I held for him spilled, dribbling to disappear in the flabby folds of his assortment of chins. "That—that man—struck me—when I refused to—pay!" he accused, stiffening rigidly to raise his arm and point at Fred Nieno.

"Geez, this don't look good," I mumbled, twisting my head to scowl up at the wild-eyed punk. Nieno's thick lips were working nervously and he kept twisting his big hands together while he tried to keep his legs from buckling beneath him.

The blonde had hastily climbed into a bulky green terrycloth robe

and her violently-shaking hands were fumbling with the belt she was trying to knot around her waist. I stopped wondering. If she finally hadn't managed to pull herself together, I might have had a heart attack, myself!

"Joseph! Everything is so—dim!" cried Mr. Bierdham, clawing the air with both hands. "I—ughhhhh . . ." His head banged against the knotty-pine panelling as his eyes rolled, then closed, and his elephantine body toppled to the floor.

"Hey! He—he ain't breathin'!" yelled Fred Nieno, quickly dropping beside the boss and bending desperately above him.

"D-dead? Y-you mean, he's d-dead?" whispered Dorrine, hovering above where I was crouched. The robe had separated again. How does a dame get such a thorough, even sun tan? The empty glass I'd been holding thudded to the floor. It didn't break. It rolled noisily into a corner.

"It was an accident! You know that, don't you, Joe?" Fred Nieno begged, staggering to his feet.

I got up, too. "What did you two try to pull?" I said. The blonde was about as close to a faint as anyone could be without keeling over. She walked woodenly to the rumpled bed and sagged down on the mattress to cover her face with her hands. She started to bawl. Soft, shuddering sobs.

"You got to believe us, Joe! How was we to know this guy had a

bum ticker?" whined the chunky gizmo, sweating and running his palsied paw over his stubbly brown hair. "Dorrine picked him as another easy mark—a guy like the jerk who stayed in the motel unit just before you and the fat gent arrived!"

"How much did you take off the boss?"

"Here it is!" Fred Nieno dug in his jacket pocket and stuck out Mr. Bierdham's billfold. "There's only a couple hundred in there! Take it, Joe! It's yours!"

"How much did you nick that other guy for?"

His mean, piggy eyes were tortured. "Aww, now Joe! We—"

"How much, Freddy?"

"Ten thousand dollars," Dorrine said between stormy heaves of her well-exposed boobies as she raised her head to glance dully at me. "I—I'd give back every penny if we could get out of this!"

"Don't be dumb!" Fred Nieno barked. He looked as if he'd just as soon slug her. He forced what was supposed to be a palsy-walsy smile, looking back at me. "Help us get the stiff back to your rooms, Joe. We can fix it to look like he croaked in his sleep."

"Uh-uh. Not me."

"Please! Please, Joe! Y-you have to help us!" pleaded the blonde, lunging off the bed to place her hands on my shoulders and her semi-nude shape pressed against me. "We—we'll cut you in

on our take, won't we, Fred?"

He didn't like to. But he gave me a grudging nod. "Yeah. A three-way split, Joe. Okay?"

"Not enough. Ten G's isn't enough," I told them. It wasn't easy for me to disengage from the pleasant contact with Dorrine, but she grabbed me again, anyway when I stepped toward the doorway.

After considerable negotiating, Fred Nieno and Dorrine agreed that the whole ten grand was for me. Plus another five G's they'd accumulated from other versions of the old badger game. Then, Freddy and me hoisted Mr. Beirdham up from the floor, both of us grunting and sweating from the efforts of lugging him out of the motel bedroom and back up the shadowy, darkened row of other units to cabin number 17.

I covered the boss up in his bed while Fred shakily ignited a cigarette. "Where's the money?" I queried.

"In the lodge safe. Listen, Joe—"

"You try a double-cross and I'll yell for the cops!"

"Can't you wait until morning? We—"

"And let you and the babe scam, leaving me to explain the corpse? Not a chance! Go ask the night clerk for your dough. I'll keep Dorrine company while you're gone—and you better knock on the bedroom door before you come in!"

It was a half-hour or so later when he knocked. Dorrine scooted

off the mattress, her long blonde hair mussed and her gorgeous complexion flushed from the exertions of our delightful exercises. Both she and Fred Nieno acted almost glad to see me saunter into the night with their loot while they scrambled to pack and vamoose.

I don't know when they checked out, but it must have been some time between three and seven in the morning because both units were already being cleaned and their car was gone when Mr. Bierdham and I went to the main lodge for breakfast.

"You almost had me fooled, too!" I said. "You won't hear me laughing about them pepsin pills or your deep-breathing practices—not when they netted us fifteen G's!"

Mr. Bierdham reached for the menu as a good-looking brunette babe in a crisp, neat white waitress uniform approached our table. From where we sat we could see the motorboats and early morning swimmers enjoying the lake.

"Six G's, Joseph, my boy," the boss said pleasantly.

I had to keep my mouth shut until the waitress took our orders. Then I stared hard at Mr. Bierdham. "What about the other nine grand?" I asked.

"That money goes back to Mr. Henry Carbell. We keep ten per cent as our fee for recovering his ten thousand dollars, Joseph. And, of course we can't return any of the additional five thousand dol-

lars. We don't know who that money belongs to," Mr. Bierdham explained, settling back in his chair.

What could I say? Arranging the badger game backfire had been strictly his idea and if it hadn't been for him, I'd still be broke, hungry, and prowling the back streets. Or, more likely in jail.

"You gonna hit the Carbell character for a job when you give him the dough?" I asked while we ate.

Mr. Bierdham meditated during a mouthful of poached eggs. He shook his head. "Our recent experience has provided me with an in-

spiration for an even more profitable and challenging career, Joseph."

"Meaning—what?"

He waved his fork like it was a sword and as if he was one of them knights of the roundtable or something. Except that you'd never fit a guy that huge into one of those metal suits.

"Meaning that there are other crooks to conquer, my boy!" he said happily. His wink got me to grinning, too.

"Yeah," I said, thinking of the blonde named Dorrine, "and other broads to jump!"



[J.] needed Lois, and Lois wanted money. Sal came along with a deal to net both. But it was a bad deal . . . all the way around.



KILLING and murder. I've thought a lot about it since the war. At least I'll always call it a war. Whoever killed the most were the best guys. If you could catch troops in the open or surprise a truck convoy and chop them up, then everybody bought you a drink. I've talked to grunts,

the guy who fight on the ground in holes. They'll tell you about their machine gunner who piled them up in front of his position. About the rabbit hunting kid from the south who could knock a gook off the next hill with an '03'. How the word that never started anywhere would pass down the line,

BY NIGHT

BY DICK MOORE



"We can't handle anymore prisoners." Those guys never turned anybody loose.

We were awful green when we got to Korea. J.J. met us in a Quonset hut. He wasn't young even then. He told us, "You may think you know how to fly! Well, you don't. If you're lucky enough to

stick around a while, we'll teach you." Him and the other guys who had been in World War II and were called back for this one worked with us and taught us. One night after I'd been there awhile, I was drinking with J.J. and I asked him, "Am I any good?" J.J. had smiled and said,

"Well, you're still alive, aren't you?" J.J. had stood for Joseph James Johnson. He was a nice guy and everything that ever meant anything to him had always turned against him. Except maybe me. He'd had a wife and a couple of kids that he loved when he was in Korea. He had told her he was flying transports. A magazine did a feature on us and J.J.'s wife saw it. She belonged to some pacifist cult and had forgiven J.J. for fighting in World War II as long as he went to church with her. She wrote J.J. that he could not come back to her and the kids. She also didn't believe in divorce, so they left it that way.

The next time I saw J.J. was in Miami. I had been out a little over a year. I was working as a co-pilot for an airline and had got engaged to a stewardess named Maggie. She wanted to get married but I wouldn't. A co-pilot only makes enough to exist on for the first two years 'till he gets on increment pay. I didn't want to get married and have her have a baby or get sick and not be able to take care of her. I did have about two thousand bucks I'd saved in the service. I was going to use it for a house and things when I got a good income, and could get married. J.J. had a girl named Lois with him. She was something. He had tried to stay in the Marine Corps after the war. That's when he'd met Lois. She'd liked him and the life, so

they had started living together. J.J. had been caught in the big rift in the Marine Corps where they pushed almost all the reserve Majors out. Maggie liked J.J. but she didn't like Lois.

J.J. had a little over three thousand he had gotten as separation pay. He wanted me to put my money with his and buy a surplus B-25 in Phoenix and convert it for air-freight. Lois thought it was a swell idea. Maggie didn't like it. I went out to Phoenix with J.J. and we bought the ship. It had all the armor plate cut out for scrap and was in flyable condition. We got a ferry permit and flew it back to Miami. The airline wanted to transfer me to New York, so I had to quit. J.J. and I started flying charters for a local outfit a couple of times a week. Also, we talked a bar owner into letting us replace a bartender he had lost and work on alternate nights. Lois liked that. She liked to sit and drink while J.J. worked, and listen to the music and dance with guys. Maggie didn't like it. We worked every minute we could spare on the airplane. It took a lot more time and money than we'd expected. There were service changes that had to be brought up to date, control surfaces to recover, systems to be taken out or changed, the cargo conversion to make, and almost three thousand dollars worth of additional radio gear needed. We got a lot of the parts on credit and guys who weren't doing anything

anyway did work for us and said pay them when we got the money. We talked an electronics dealer into putting the radio gear in and letting us pay him when we made money. If we didn't make money he would get his radio gear back and lose his labor. When we finished we had about nine thousand in it.

It was about the time we got working on the plane, Maggie started sleeping with me. She had always been warm but never allowed any messing around. It was J.J.'s night to work in the bar, so I went over to Maggie's and she fixed supper for me. Her two room-mates were out on trips. We never spent any money any more. I drove her down to Miami Springs and we walked around the circle and looked in the windows. Then we went back to her place. She had a sixpack of beer in the icebox and we watched T.V. Pretty soon she said she wanted to change. She went into the bedroom and left the door open. She got some clothes out of the dresser and went into the bathroom. Pretty soon she came out. Her hair was all fixed up and she had on a bathrobe. She went over and turned down one of the beds and then came into the living room. "I want to show you something," she said. "What?" I'd answered. "The nightgown I bought for our wedding night." Then she took the robe off. It was lavender and had lots of frills. You could see through it. Then she had said,

"Now kiss me and then go get in bed." She had never done it before and I was surprised. I thought everyone had. I felt like hell when we finished. She was never bashful about it. She slept with me every night except when she was out on a trip. When the other two girls were out on trips we would stay at her place. When they were in town she stayed with me at the apartment I shared with J.J. and Lois. Sometimes we even went to her place when the girls were out on dates and spent a couple of hours. She said she would have moved in with me, but her apartment was a cheap one and her third of the expenses wasn't much. Besides, she wanted some place where we could be alone part of the time. J.J. and I always got up early to work on the airplane. Maggie always got up and fixed us breakfast. She also made Lois get up. When we left they would be sitting at the kitchen table drinking coffee. I know they talked about our sex life because Maggie started making real wild love to me. I told her she didn't have to, but she said, "You're my man and I'm going to do everything I can to keep you."

When we finished the plane, things didn't go so good. We had trouble getting sojourn permits from the State Department because it was still a military type plane. We had a restricted license which limited us to carrying our own goods and had to make an agree-

ment with American shippers where they sold us the cargo and then we sold it back on delivery. We couldn't afford insurance because full insurance cost almost half the value of the aircraft per year. That made cargo insurance higher. We hardly ever bothered with it. We were restricted to small heavy cargo because of the configuration of the aircraft. The shippers didn't quite trust us because we were new and a fly-by-night outfit. We were way in debt. We still had one big advantage. We could operate a lot cheaper for our gross and speed than our competition. It was hard. We got a few loads of boned beef and shrimp from Honduras and Guatemala. The beef loads always took bribes and the shrimp didn't pay much. We hauled apples and chickens, truck tires and batteries and small machinery to Belize and other places in Central America. We hauled fertilizer and equipment from Miami to Andres Island before the produce season came in. When the season came, we hauled produce from Andres to Miami. We worked from before daylight 'till after dark or not at all. We still flew charters, but quit tending bar. When one of us had a charter, the other would pick up a kid around the airport to fly copilot for a couple of bucks an hour and the experience. Then we made a deal with several of the South American airlines. If they had freight they couldn't handle, they

gave us a load at a discount price. Everything we made above bare expenses went to pay our debts. In six months we had paid our debts and business was improving every day. People were getting to know us.

It was then that we heard about the run from Managua to San Juan and Sal Benelli showed up. Porto Rico was too over-populated and had little room to grow anything but sugarcane. Nicaragua was underpopulated and overrun with cows. The meat wasn't too good but O.K. for the poor meat-starved Porto Ricans. Some South Americans had been making the run in a beat-up old Connie. They weren't making much and the first major breakdown they had on the Connie would have put them out of business. So J.J. went to Managua to talk to the meat people. The haul was ideal for the B-25. It could operate at a lot lower price per pound than the Connie. The only difference was, we would have to make more trips. We could make a good buck from the contract. J.J. came back. They were very interested in us. There would be five or six loads a week. We could net over four hundred a load. How much over depended on the maintenance we ran into. Two thousand to twenty five hundred a week. This was the payoff. But! . . . and that had folded it. They believed we could make it but we only had one airplane and it couldn't take that schedule for

too long. We had no capitol for major maintenance at the offset. They had to be sure of delivery. If we could come up with another aircraft and some operating capitol to start with, the contract was ours.

Sal had been one of J.J.'s best friends in Korea. He had helped me a lot too, when I was first starting out over there. And he had always treated me O.K. He had a deal. Some hot cargo for Venezuela. Prices were prohibitive down there. Freight was high. Hauling facilities were inadequate. Some merchandise was almost impossible to get at any price. Duties were almost one hundred percent on this particular cargo. We said no. It was too risky. Sal said it wasn't. There was only one road into the field. The jungle was too thick to get through. He would station men with walkie talkies along the road twenty four hours a day. We would come in just after dark. There would be light signals on the road and at the field. They would change every night. If the lights weren't right, we would turn around and go back to Kingston. We would have to stop at Kingston on the way down and pick up enough fuel to get back there anyway, because we couldn't refuel at the field. The authorities couldn't surprise them. There was only one way in and they would have plenty of warning. We would have plenty of time to get off. Even if we didn't, there was a fast mountain

stream at the end of the field. They would dump the cargo there and it would be washed away into the jungle. All they would have us for is illegal entry. Lois was real enthusiastic about it. J.J. wanted to do it. Maggie said no. We'd keep plugging along till we got the money for Manaqua. I had to go along with Maggie. Then Lois said, "I'm tired of living like an animal! I love you J.J. and haven't been stepping out on you. But there's a guy. He's loaded and he's gone on me. He'll go down and marry me in the morning." Now I had to agree. "How much?" I asked. "Five ten thousand pound loads. Two thousand a load plus expenses," J.J. said, "Half and expenses now and half when we finish?" Sal said, "No." J.J. said, "Expenses now and something on account for each trip." "No," Sal said. "Then what the hell are you offering?" J.J. said. "The whole load when you finish. I've got every dime tied up in the cargo and setting up the disposal down there. You'll have to get up the expense money J.J." J.J. looked sick. Lois looked down at her lap. Maggie said, "How much will the expenses be J.J.?" "A little under a thousand a trip, with standby maintenance and high gas in Kingston. "Maggie reached in her purse and pulled out a bankbook and threw it on the table. She looked at me. "When we decided to get married, you started saving your money. So, so did I. I'm known as, 'the girl who'll have

dinner or coffee with anybody but won't leave the table with you,' in every airport in the eastern half of the United States. There's a little over four thousand there. You can make it if you squeeze." I remembered now. She'd had lots of clothes when I met her. Yet I have never seen her with anything new except essentials. She and another girl had had a nice place in Miami Springs in an apartment with a pool and patio. Right away, she had moved to Hialeah with two other girls into a small, cheap small apartment.

The trips were hard. Five of them in five days. Almost seven hours flying time each way. We had to go around the end of Cuba each way, because of our military configuration and we were an itinerant aircraft. We had to stop at Kingston going and coming. The drop was good though. We could come in every night just after dark. The lights were always right. Sal had plenty of men and trucks there. They would get the cargo off as fast as possible. We never shut the engines down. As soon as the last piece was clear we closed up and took off. We had to leave Miami before noon and got back about daylight. We had maintenance people standing by to take care of the gripes on the plane. One of us had to stay there and make sure everything was done right. The other went home to sleep. J.J. worked so I could go home when Maggie was in town. When we were in the air

one of us slept in the right seat while the other flew, unless we were going through weather. Everything went fine.

On the last trip we were beat, but felt good as we came into the field. The lights were O.K. We were getting good at hitting this small mountain field at night with only a set of truck lights at each end. It was a good landing and the boys swarmed over the plane. They were getting better too. The cargo was coming out even faster than before. Usually we stayed in the plane. Tonight we left the engines running and set the parking brake and got out. J.J. looked around. Then he grabbed a guy who seemed to be a straw boss. We'd seen him there every night. "Where's Sal?" J.J. asked him. The man shook his head and said something in Spanish. Then he turned and yelled at the loaders. J.J. looked worried. I knew I was. When the last piece of cargo cleared the plane, one of the loaders slammed the aft drop-out door and they all scurried to the side as if they expected us to zoom away like we always did. They looked around and there was some chattering. Then they started loading the trucks. That went a lot faster than the unloading. They pulled the trucks right up beside the plane. They didn't have the small openings to worry about that they had in the plane. Each man seemed to have a certain truck he was supposed to load. It was a well organ-

ized operation. When the trucks were loaded and the drivers were starting their engines, J.J. eased up behind the straw boss and stuck his gun in his back. Then he motioned the two lead truck drivers over. When they got close enough he showed them the gun. "Nobody is going anyplace 'till Sal shows up."

In about five minutes we saw headlights bumping down the road. Sal pulled the jeep up beside the lead truck and jumped out. He came running over to us shouting, "What's the matter, what's the holdup?" J.J. held the gun at his side so Sal couldn't see it. Sal looked at us. "Sorry I'm late, boys!" Then he turned to the drivers and strawboss. "Come on! Get going! We can't wait all night. This stuff has to be under wraps by daylight." The three of them glanced at J.J. and then started toward their trucks. As the trucks started to move Sal turned to us. "I saw you come in. I was up checking the lookouts. I tried to get down here, but got stuck in a mud hole. Had to walk about a half mile to get one of the lookouts to help push me out. Guess you want your money. Come on over to the jeep." We followed him to the jeep. He got in behind the wheel and then said, "The pay-off's in Miami next week." "Wait a minute!" J.J. said, "You promised as soon as we delivered the last load. Why we haven't even got money to buy gas in Kingston." Sal lifted one hand. "Why I couldn't bring fifteen

grand out here. I can't bring a dime. Anyone of these guys would kill you for fifteen bucks." J.J. twisted toward him. "Why you've probably already sold everything except what we brought tonight. You for damn sure can pay us." Sal brought his hand up from between the seats. He was holding a big Colt .45 automatic. "O.K., J.J. There's no payoff. Just get back in your plane and go to Miami and forget all this. This deal is a lot bigger than me. The only reason they didn't have me shoot you and take your plane was because I talked them out of it. I told them you used to be buddies of mine and you guys did put up the expense money. Good thing your girl friend had that money, huh, kid? Now just back up to that plane and climb aboard." J.J. was still holding the gun at his side. Sal hadn't seen it. When we got to the ladder, he backed past it and motioned me up with the other hand. As soon as my body was in the cockpit, I heard two shots. I jerked out my pistol and jumped to the cabin window. Sal was laying on his back beside the jeep. His feet were hung up in the floor of the jeep. J.J. was already on him. When I got to the jeep, J.J. had turned Sal's pockets inside out. He was feeling about his belly, under his arms, down his legs in his crotch. J.J. leaped back. "He hasn't got a God damned cent on him." He grabbed a flashlight and started looking in the jeep glove compart-

ment, under the dash, under the hook, under the jeep. Then he made a little noise and grabbed Sal under the arms. He lifted him in behind the wheel and released the emergency. He walked beside the jeep, steering it toward the little mountain river until the bank steepened. Then he stopped and the jeep rolled on into the river. It rolled in front of the water like it was made of light wood, away into the jungle. J.J. stood on the bank and shook his fist after it. "I hope the monkeys eat you, you bastard!" It sounded like a moan.

We didn't say anything 'till we got to Kingston. I flew. J.J. just sat there. In Kingston, I talked one of the service company managers that knew us into giving us enough fuel to get to Miami on credit. Then I started up and taxied out. At the end of the runway I couldn't get the magnetoes on the starboard engine to check out. I tried to burn 'em out. Then I tried to blast 'em out. Neither worked. On about my forth mag check, J.J. looked over at me. "Hell, go on. Go! It may be fouled plugs or it may be a bad mag. It don't make any difference. We haven't got enough money to get it fixed. She'll hold out 'till we get to Miami. If it don't, we can make it on one empty." So I grabbed a fist full of throttles, propeller controls and fuel controls and pushed them all, all the way forward. As we approached the southeastern end of

Cuba I looked over at J.J. "You shouldn't have killed him. J.J." J.J. just bent his head lower and started to sob. "The bastard didn't pay us. I'm going to lose Lois." I felt sorry for him and tried to comfort him. "Look, J.J. Your wife left you when you were in Korea. You loved her a lot. Then you found Lois." J.J. buried his face in his hands and sobbed more. "This is different. I loved my wife a lot. But, I could go out with other women and get a kick out of it. I did a few times, but when I was through I always wanted to go back to my wife. But it's altogether different with Lois. I've tried having other women. They're flat,—nothing. I can't even stand them." I knew what he meant. I'd never tried it, but I knew it would be the same as far as Maggie and I were concerned. J.J. sobbed for a long time.

We'd lost power on the starboard engine quite some time back. She'd backfire and miss above 22 inches of manifold pressure. I didn't feather it. I just pulled the port engine back to the same power. It was carrying us along nice and easy. After all, I wasn't anxious to get home and face the girls. We were flying northwest about fifty miles north of Cuba. We were almost south of Andres Island. It was almost daylight. Maybe I sensed it,—maybe I saw the reflection in the windshield. But I knew it was there. I looked over my left shoulder and the port engine was on fire. J.J. was leaning

forward in his seat, looking across me. He yelled, "Give 'er full throttle! Maybe you can blast it out!" I did. As I scanned the instruments, my eyes stopped on the port engine oil gage. I pointed to it. J.J. said, "God damn oil line broke. It's squirting on those hot cylinders. Keep 'er goin' as long as you can! Turn toward Andres. Maybe we can make the field there. We can't land in Cuba." I'd already started the bank. J.J. was already unstrapping. He grabbed a screwdriver. "I'll start throwing radio gear out. Try to get Nassau on JFF. If that don't work, try Miami overseas on H.F. I'll throw those two out last." As I keyed my mike, I felt the rush of air as J.J. jettisoned the fall-out door in the floor of the cabin. I made my call. "Nassau control. Nassau control. Nan 98B." The crisp English voice came right back. "98B-Nassau." The port engine was just bearly turning, so I feathered it before it froze. "Nassau 98B,—just about over the south tip of Andres. Six thousand. Our port engine's on fire and I've only got partial power on the starboard. We're going to try to make the field!" Nassau came back, "Roger, sir. I'll alert them and have someone out to meet you." I could hear the scraping sounds as J.J. tore the gear out in back and the crashes as he threw pieces at the hole in the floor. I peered from the altimeter to over the nose at the Island below me. God, I wished there was more light. Finally, I yelled back to

J.J., "Come on up and strap in. We aren't going to make it." Then I picked up the mike and gave Nassau a call, "Nassau, Nassau, 98B. We aren't going to make it. We're going in about eight or ten miles south of the field." Nassau came back. "Roger 98B. I'll send somebody down to pick you chaps up. Good luck." I put the mike down and reached overhead and pulled the jettison handle on the escape panel in the roof of the cockpit. I felt a rush of cool air as it fell away. J.J. was strapped in by then. I reached down and twisted the fuel selector and said, "Fuel selector off." J.J. repeated it. I put my hand on the console and waited for the starboard engine to cough and die. I hit the feather button. When it died, I talked off my check list. "Fuel controls off. Throttles off. Battery off. Generator off. All radio switches off." J.J. repeated everything after me. I looked out and could see what looked like clumps of bushes on flat sand. I knew they were mangroves sitting in shallow, murky water. J.J. said, "Thank God, this island's flat." I wished there was more light. I dropped my flaps and felt the ship rise and slow down. Then I got her as slow as possible and the nose as high as possible. The bump we got when we hit wasn't bad at all. I could feel her skipping across the water. Hear the water splash against the windshield, the mangroves drag along the fuselage. I couldn't see

anything. The water was rushing over the windshield. The next bump was murder. I had the feeling of tumbling. Everything was black and confusion.

At first I thought we were on our back. Then I saw a little something that looked like sky above me. I said, "J.J., are you O.K.?" I barely heard him answer, "Yeah, are you? Can you get out?" I answered, "Yeah, I think so." I hit my strap release and stood up on the seat. I put my hand cautiously up to the little hole of sky. I was afraid of broken glass but there wasn't any. I stepped on the back of the seat and worked my way into the hole. It was tight, but I made it. I grabbed an antenna wire or something and dragged my body along the fuselage, trailing my legs through the hole. When they fell free, I let myself drop into the water. I went in about to my waist. From down there I could see what had happened. We had hit a coral knob or something solid. The nose was all pushed in. The fuselage had broken in two and was folded over the cockpit. It rested right over the escape port in the roof of the cockpit. I heard J.J. grunt above me. I found a hand hold and climbed up on the nose to give him a hand. He had his head and shoulder out, but that was as far as he could go. I was a lot thinner than J.J. I tried to pull the wreckage away. J.J. said, "It's no use kid. You can't budge it." I told him, "We'll have to find an-

other way out." He looked up at me. "Yeah, and fast. That port engine's still burning and-smell!" I sniffed. The gasoline fumes were strong. We'd ruptured a tank somehow. I leaned in the hole. "Give me the fire extinguisher. I'll take care of that." I heard him splashing around and saw him switch on his flashlight. Then he said, "I can't. The plates are buckled around it. I would take a cutting torch to get it out." I said, "Can you crawl out over the bomb bay or maybe the plates broke loose and you can go through it." I heard him splashing around. "No, the fuselage is bent down right on top of the spar. The plates in front of the bomb bay are twisted, but as solid as a rock." I was racking my brain. "Try the crawl-way to the nose. Maybe you can get out there. It's pretty well torn up." "It's under water," J.J. said, "But I'll give it a try." I heard him splashing around. Then he came up sputtering. "It feels like the whole damn nose is shoved up that crawlway." "Try the drop-out hatch in the floor. If you can get your feet out, maybe I can drag you through the mud." I heard him splash some more. Then he said, "It feels like solid coral down there. Whatever it is, it's solid. Get behind the engine. I think I know how to get out." I jumped off the plane and waded over behind the starboard nacelle. I heard four shots and the ping of bullets hitting metal. I stepped out from behind the

nacelle. "Hey! What are you doing?" I heard plexiglass breaking. "I'm trying to shoot the stringers loose in the side of the cockpit. I almost got it. Give me your gun. Mine's empty." I started wading towards the cockpit. Then it happened. There was a big "whoosh." Something pushed me back. My hands and face burned. When I opened my eyes, the whole port side of the plane was on fire. J.J.'s face was so contorted I could hardly recognize him. His eyes were like large diamonds. I knew then that no matter how hard I tried not to, I'd always remember him like that. There was an eerie sound. I realized it was J.J. screaming. He was tearing at the stringers and jamming his fist through the plexiglass. I pulled my pistol out and took a step forward and fired. I don't know whether I shut my eyes or the fire blinded me. Anyway, I had to step back before I could see. J.J. was gone and he had stopped screaming. I turned and

stumbled forward. Then I was choking. I realized my head was under water. I groped and got hold of a mangrove and pulled myself up and was sick some more. Finally, I was still sick, but had nothing left to get sick with any more. I stumbled on away from the plane. Then I found a sheet of metal that had torn from the plane. I dragged it up on a clump of grass and fell on it. I lay there and waited for them to come and get me. I was still sick. I could smell the putrid smell of the salt flats, the gasoline, and J.J. burning. But I knew two things as I lay there. When I got back to Miami, I was going to get a job with an airline. I may never get rich, but after two years I'd have a good income and I'd be doing what I wanted to do. The second thing was, I was going to marry Maggie as soon as I got back. I had a woman who would stick by me no matter what. She'd already proved that. By the God above, I'd know it 'till I died.



MANHUNT'S

Books for Men

1. **HUMOR PACKAGE.** Just what the doctor ordered. **WHAT'S NUDE** by Fred Gwynne and Peter Bosch, published at \$1.50 and **JAIL KEYS MADE HERE** by Lee Boltin and Patrick Dennis, published at \$1.50. A \$3.00 value. Both for **\$1.00**

2. **THE CHAPMAN REPORT.** By Irving Wallace. A sensational and outspoken best selling novel about the sex habits of the American female. Pub. at \$4.50. **\$1.00**

3. **EIGHT NUDES BY RODIN.** Eight simple, flowing sketches of a master's masculine concept of the feminine form. Originally published at \$8.00. **Special \$1.98**

4. **THE FEMALE FORM BY MATISSE.** These eight beautiful prints fully express Matisse's sensitivity to the female form. Pub. at \$8.00. **Special \$1.98**

5. **EIGHT NUDES BY MAILLOL.** Exciting, esoteric realism created by this great French artist. Pub. at \$8.00. **Special \$1.98**

6. **EIGHT NUDES BY MODIGLIANI.** Delicate feminine forms come to life through the exotic skill of this great modern painter. Pub. at \$8.00. **Special \$1.98**

7. **EIGHT NUDES BY DEGAS.** The most exciting examples of this great artist's work. Pub. at \$8.00. **Special \$1.98**

8. **HOW TO ACCUMULATE WEALTH THROUGH STOCK SPECULATION.** By I. W. Jacquin and J. A. Costa. The first truly authoritative book on stock speculation, written by two broker speculators who have become successful by their own speculative ventures. **\$1.00**

9. **DICTIONARY OF APHRODISIACS.** Edited by H. Wedick. An illustrated survey that classifies the herbal, scientific, medical and culinary means that man has taken through the ages to increase his virility. Almost 2,000 entries. **\$4.98**

10. **CANDIDE AND OTHER ROMANCES.** Voltaire's brilliant and cynical satire and other masterpieces equally biting, witty and unblushing. Illustrated. **\$1.00**

11. **WORKS OF RABELAIS.** The famous Urquhart and Motteux translation of the greatest ribald classic of them all, chronicling the adventures of Gargantua and Pantagruel. Many illustrations. Over 700 pages. **\$1.90**

12. **WATER OF LIFE.** By Henry Morton Robinson. An almost unbelievable tale of both man's goodness and man's depravity by the author of *The Cardinal*. Pub. at \$5.95. **\$1.00**

13. **THE COMPLETE ILLUSTRATED BOOK OF YOGA.** By Swami Vishnudevananda. All the essential knowledge of the mental science of yoga is contained in this complete, illustrated handbook: breathing exercises, concentration, meditation, diet, philosophy, a training program, charts, glossary, index and over 140 full page photographs. A must for every student of yoga. Pub. at \$10.00. **\$4.98**

14. **THE NUDE (NUS.).** By Andre De Dienes. The master of photographic art—lighting, composition, style, etc.—has assembled his finest work plus a sampling of others on the female form to instruct and delight the connoisseur of art and photography. Over 120 full plates of great beauty and dignity, that will be treasured by all photographers, professional and amateur. Pub. at \$7.50. **\$4.95**

15. **ARTHRITIS CAN BE CURED.** By Bernard Aschner, M.D. The former chief of the outpatient department of the Stuyvesant Polyclinic and Lebanon Hospitals in New York presents his methods of curing Arthritis, Rheumatism, Neuralgia, Sciatica, Bursitis, Lumbago, and Neuritis. A challenging book which no sufferer can afford not to read. Pub. at \$3.95. **\$1.00**

16. **THE GIRL OF CHASTITY: A Medico Historical Study.** By Eric John Dingwall. A fascinating, scholarly and scientific history of one of the strangest, crudest and most humiliating devices fashioned by man, and perhaps the most foolish—the chastity belt; how jealous men held their wives and daughters in cruel subjugation; how women gained their freedom; surprisingly recent and widespread use of the chastity belt; a survey of poems, stories and books in which they are mentioned. Photos and drawings. Softbound. **Special \$1.98**

17. **LOVE WITHOUT FEAR.** By Eustace Chesser, M.D. This is probably the most important book published on the subject. Over 1,000,000 copies sold. Covers every phase of life to give the reader mastery of life's techniques. Pub. at \$3.75. **\$1.98**
18. **THE HIDING PLACE.** By Lone Johnstone. An exotic story of the secret place of the body and the mind that will challenge the reader to dig deeper into his own sexual and spiritual emotions to better understand this strange tale. Pub. at \$3.95 **\$1.00**
19. **THE MARQUIS DE SADE.** By C. R. Dawes. Selections from dramatic works, *Aline et Valcour, La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, Justine, ou les Malheurs de la Vertu, Juliette, ou les Prosperites du Vice, Les Crimes de l'Amour, Zoloe et les Deux Acolytes, Les 120 Journées*, etc. Originally published in Europe. Softbound. **\$1.95**
20. **BY GONE PUNISHMENTS.** By Andrews and Brooks. A clear concise history of punishment the world over. Illustrated and indexed. Softbound. Special **\$2.98**
21. **THE MARRIAGE BED: An Analyst's Casebook.** By Harry F. Tashman, M.D. A profound examination of the sexual habits and customs of the American married couple in city, suburban and rural life. Illustrated with case histories. Pub. at \$4.95 **\$2.98**
22. **INCREASE YOUR SPEAKING POWER: Correct English.** A complete and simple course in English that will increase your vocabulary and help make you an effective speaker. This full course consists of an unbreakable 12" long playing record (33 $\frac{1}{3}$ RPM) and a correlated manual. Boxed. Pub. at \$5.95. **\$2.98**
23. **THE NIGHTLESS CITY: YOSHIWARA.** By J. E. DeBecker. A classical study and history of prostitution, social slavery and mores of Japan. Softbound. Special **\$2.98**
24. **LOVE IS A MAN'S AFFAIR.** Edited by Fred Kerner. A robust volume full of bright stories, essays, rhymes and cartoons all purporting to prove that love is a man's affair. Pub. at \$3.00. **\$1.00**
25. **LOVERS, MATES, AND STRANGE BEDFELLOWS.** Old-World Folktales. Edited by J. R. Foster. 40 wonderful folk tales from Ireland, Armenia, Greece, Turkey, Russia, France, Germany, etc., full of ancient lore and superstition. Pub. at \$3.50 **\$1.49**
26. **AN UNHURRIED VIEW OF EROTICA.** By Ralph Ginzburg. Intro. by Dr. Theodor Reik. Preface by George Jean Nathan. The first book ever published with all the basic facts about erotic literature in the English language. Discusses the 2,000 hard core titles of erotica in Rare Book Rooms and on Restricted Shelves of world's great libraries. Here are synopsis and passages from FANNY HILL, selections from the unexpurgated LADY CHATTERLY'S LOVER, the complete story behind Mark Twain's little known "1601", and Frank Harris' MY LIFE AND LOVES. Fine binding boxed. Large size page. Pub. at \$6.50 in Limited Edition. **\$4.95**
27. **CALENDAR MODEL.** An Autobiography by Gloria Gale. Anyone interested in the art will appreciate the experiences of this famous model. With 34 photographs. Pub. at \$2.95. **\$1.00**
28. **LAUGHTER IN BED.** By Eddie Davis. A clever compendium of comedy and cartoons, plus a collection of quizzes, puzzles and gimmicks that will cheer the sick and the healthy. Pub. at \$2.95. **\$1.49**
29. **WOMAN IN EUROPEAN ART.** Here in beautiful color and black and white are 114 lovely women as painted by the world's greatest artists. Figure studies of the Greeks and Romans, voluptuous forms of the Middle Ages, the sleek nudes of Manet. Individually boxed. Pub. at \$10.00. **\$4.95**
30. **PEACEABLE LANE.** By Kalth Wheeler. A powerful story of race relations in a suburban community that does not gloss over the emotions, conflicts and brutalities that often develop between Negro and white. Pub. at \$5.00 **\$1.00**
31. **Art Linkletter's CONFESSIONS OF A HAPPY MAN.** Here is the life, hopes and aspirations of one of America's most famous TV stars. Illustrated with many photographs. Pub. at \$3.95. **\$1.00**

Mail this coupon to:

MANHUNT, Dept. 62, 545 Fifth Ave., New York 17, N. Y.

Please send me the books circled below:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31

Enclosed please find \$_____

IMPORTANT: Add 50¢ per order for all orders less than \$5. No CODs. New York residents add 3% city sales tax.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____

ZONE _____

THE GLOVE, purplish with sweat, floated out of nowhere.

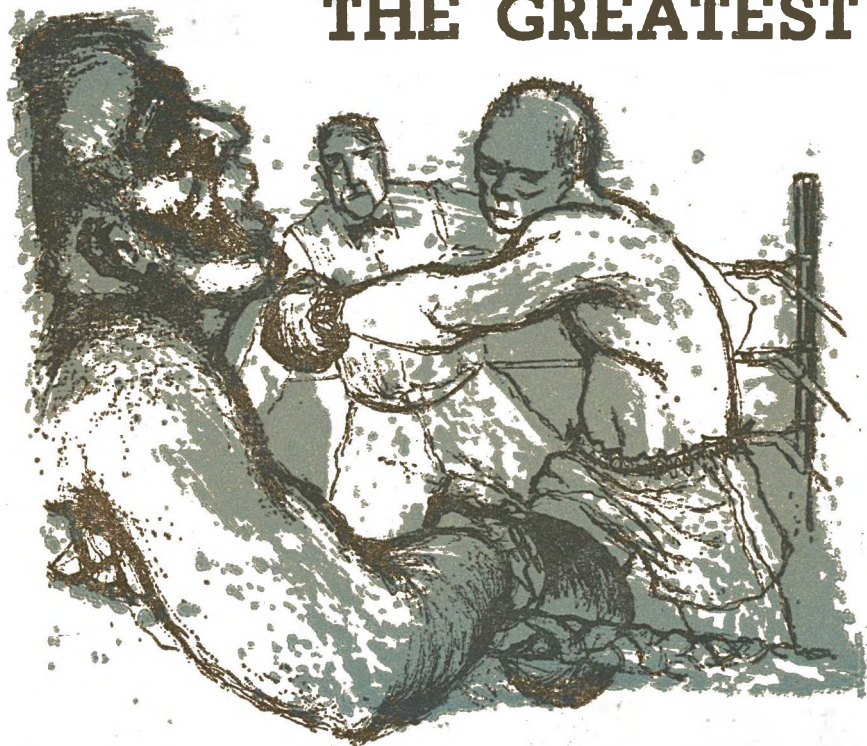
"Slip it," Honeyboy thought calmly. "And counter."

The glove floated toward him, growing larger. Then he lost sight of it.

"Missed," he thought placidly. But it didn't.

And Honeyboy lost track of a little stretch of time. He knew he'd blacked out because he found himself sitting in his corner. He couldn't remember how he got there.

THE GREATEST



BY HOLLIS GALE

He had clawed his way up from nobody to champ. Now people were saying he was slipping. Honeyboy couldn't stand that.

Dave was staring at him. Anxious round face, a swab-stick jutting between clenched teeth.

"Who are you?"

Honeyboy tried to wink with his bad eye. "Who's the greatest in the land?"

Their old refrain.

Dave grinned with relief. "You, Honeyboy, you're the greatest of them all."

"Got to stay that way."

Dave worked on him. "Watch his right. Sneaks you on the break."

"Funny . . ."

"What?"

"I don't remember so good . . . what happened before that belt . . . all jumbled up."

"You'll shake it off."

He raised his head. "Where's Verna?"

Dave pushed his head back gently. "Didn't show yet."

Honeyboy frowned, puzzled. "She's always out there. Always."

"She'll make it." The buzzer sounded. "Move, Honeyboy. Tenth coming up. Move. Hands high."

Honeyboy had a strange feeling of detachment. Nothing seemed quite real. He knew he was hitting the challenger but he couldn't hear the sound of the punches landing. He knew he was getting hit but he didn't feel anything. Everything seemed to be happening in slow motion. There was no hurry at all.

Then Dave was flicking water in his face.

"Listen to the mob," he said.

"What's with them?"

"They love you."

Honeyboy breathed hard. "It don't last."

"What does?"

"Want it to. . . want it to."

"Quiet, Honeyboy."

Again he frowned. A slow, baffled look. "Where's Verna?"

"No one seen her. What you tell her back at the hotel?"

"I—can't remember."

"You will." They boosted him up.

"Let's go. Box him, box him, 'till he's open."

The rounds ran together, curiously dreamlike. He knew he was weaving, bending, throwing leather; but it all seemed without purpose, without meaning.

He came to believe that others knew something he didn't.

"They know how it's going to end," he told himself. "Everyone knows but me."

Dave's face was in front of him again.

"Feel okay?"

"Guess so. How's it going?"

"You. On points."

Honeyboy moved his bruised lips carefully. "See. Old Honeyboy ain't dead."

"Who said you were?"

"Lots. Gonna bury me."

"Them crumbs."

"Sure. My pals. I know. They'll walk out if I get jocked."

"Who needs that kind?"

"I do." His chest rose and fell. "See Verna yet?"

"No. Maybe couldn't make it."

He closed his eyes. "Wish I could remember what—"

"It'll come back."

He went out at the bell. It seemed as if they'd been fighting forever. But on a curious plane, beyond rage, beyond personal feeling. And he still believed that no matter what either one did the outcome was already marked in the books.

The bell.

He sat down. They removed his mouthpiece. Water sloshed over his head. They lifted the waistband of his trunks to give him breathing room. A towel passed across his face.

"Keep going like this," said Dave, "and they'll hold up your hand when it's over."

"Got to be like that," said Honeyboy, "because if I ain't champ, what am I?"

"Don't talk."

"I'm what I was in the beginning."

"Relax, Honeyboy."

"Which was nothing."

"Goddamit, Honeyboy."

"Which was being alone. Awful alone."

"Hold still."

"Oh, and it's cold out there."

"There's the buzzer."

"Where the hell's Verna?" he said, staring down at the blur of ringside faces.

"Never mind. Get out there!"

"Wish I knew."

And the bell. The challenger in

front of him now. The menacing dance. Always coming in. Young. Hungry.

"You want it, thought Honeyboy. My crown. Always reaching. I know you, you bastard. I was like you once. But you'll never be as hungry as I was. You'll never bleed for it the way I did."

"What were you saying to him?" Dave asked.

Honeyboy looked surprised. "Was I talking?"

"You all right, Honeyboy?"

"Sure. He's my meat."

"Two more to go, Honeyboy. Two more and it's yours."

"And still champ."

"Don't let him tag you."

"I'll show them pallbearers. Gonna bury me early, huh? Walking out on Honeyboy. They're gonna eat dirt."

"That's it."

"Then I got to find Verna."

"You'll find her."

The challenger prowling. Hunched, glistening shoulders. Peering, intent eyes. He came in. Honeyboy saw the opening.

"Nail him!" His brain said.

But, then, the opening was gone and his punch was late. The challenger's glove came over. The big right.

Again he had the strange sense of slowed-down action. The leather fist seemed to hang suspended in the air.

Then it connected.

The unhooking jolt. White

streaks. Fanning out like cracks in ice. No legs. The ring pitched.

He was a statue. Flat. Staring up at the lights.

Far-off, a surf-like murmuring. Closer, a single voice chanted, evenly, dispassionately.

The lights revolved. A slow procession of miniature suns. A face among them. Hers. Vivid lips. A sheaf of blonde hair. Only the eyes were shadowed, unreadable.

"Verna," he said, "don't leave me."

She smiled among the wheeling suns.

"Don't go, Verna. There's lots of big paynights left for Honeyboy."

The voice close to his ear said something in a flat, unvarying tone. One word. It sounded like, "Door."

"You can't walk out, baby. Don't listen to them yappers. I'm still the best man."

The lights steadied slowly. Her face was very small. Nearby, the mechanical voice spoke again. "Sever," it seemed to say.

"Remember the sword the French give me? . . . the crusader's sword . . . belonged to some old king . . . King's die hard, Verna."

"Late," the voice droned.

"Ah, baby," Honeyboy said, staring up into the lights, "I don't want to be alone again. When I was little . . . back then . . . they all ditched me."

"Ma had to go and die . . . and Daddy took a train . . . All by my

lonesome. Scared . . . dirty little halfbreed. Alone and bawling and pissing myself because I was lost and nobody cared. Don't want to lose anybody again—ever."

Her face was fading.

"Wait, Verna."

The red mouth still smiled.

Her mouth, he thought. Too much lipstick—dripping down.

Then he remembered.

"Nine!" The voice said with immense clarity.

"Honeeboo!" Dave's voice.

And the canvas was beneath his feet and he was going forward. Swinging.

"That's the one. He don't like it there. He's hurt. Hurt good. Now. Set him up. One-two hard. That's it. Now. Bang him out."

Then there was a blank spot.

He found himself standing in the center of the ring. The ref was holding his glove high. The noise of the crowd broke over him, a deep, baying roar. Men were jumping through the ropes. Dave was kissing him.

"Only you, Honeyboy . . . only you . . . beat the count . . . caught him coming in with a right hook—a bomb—a miracle."

"I saw Verna," said Honeyboy.

"What a finish." Dave was laughing. "What a guy we got."

"Just couldn't let her go," said Honeyboy as they led him toward his corner.

"You feel okay? Still woozy, huh?"

"I told her . . . can't be alone."

He knew the cop who was waiting for him in the corner. A big guy named Neary. Homicide cop.

"Honeyboy," said Neary, "I just came from the hotel."

He nodded. "She tried to go out the door."

"We got to take you in, champ."

"What is this?" Dave stood rooted.

The detective looked at Honeyboy. "We got the word just when

you were climbing through the ropes. But, hell, we couldn't stop it then. Not a title fight."

Behind him Honeyboy heard the whispers. Broken, awed.

. . . walking out she was."

. . . whacked off her head."

. . . that goddamn big sword."

He put his glove on Dave's shoulder.

"Who's the greatest in the land?"

"You—you, Honeyboy, you're the greatest of them all."



According to Plan

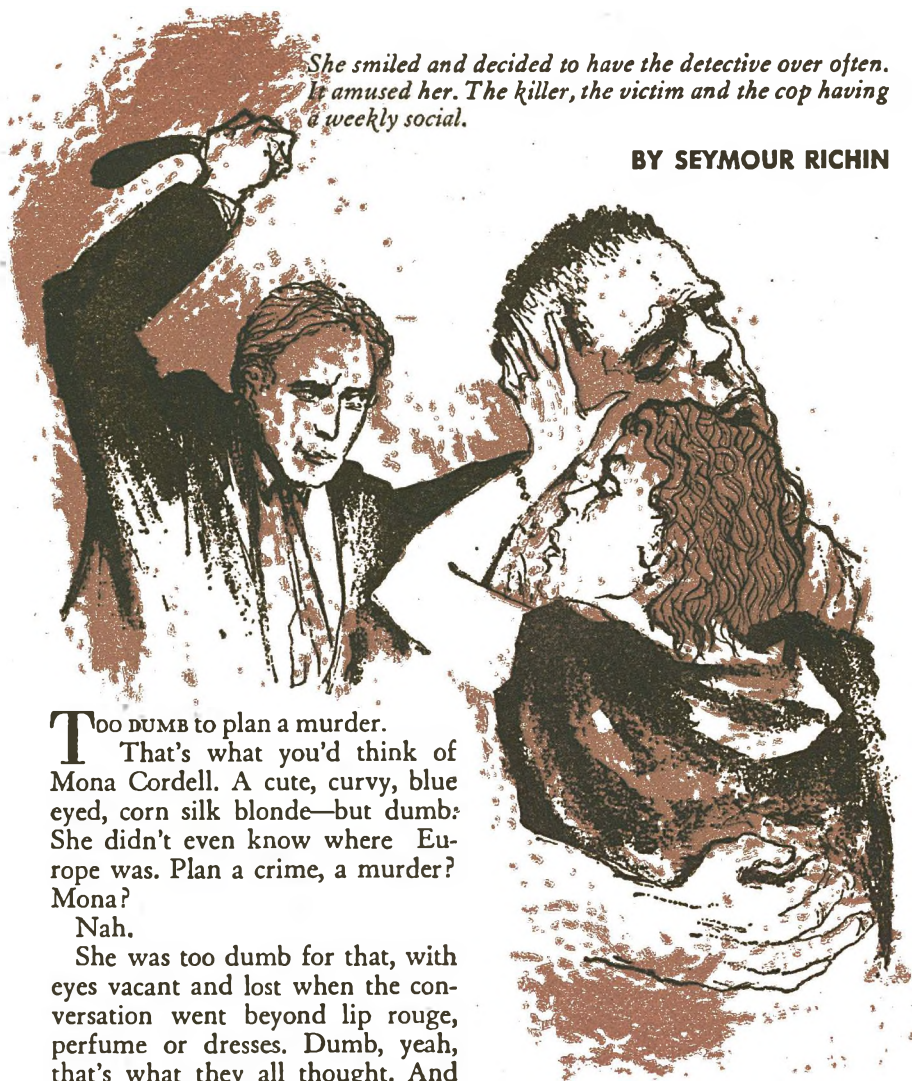
She smiled and decided to have the detective over often. It amused her. The killer, the victim and the cop having a weekly social.

BY SEYMOUR RICHIN

TOO DUMB to plan a murder. That's what you'd think of Mona Cordell. A cute, curvy, blue eyed, corn silk blonde—but dumb. She didn't even know where Europe was. Plan a crime, a murder? Mona?

Nah.

She was too dumb for that, with eyes vacant and lost when the conversation went beyond lip rouge, perfume or dresses. Dumb, yeah, that's what they all thought. And that's precisely what little, schem-



ing, murderous Mona wanted them to think . . .

Smart, really.

Because behind her childish eyes ticked a swiss watch brain. She missed no tricks. She couldn't afford to—not any more. She sang in LUIGI'S, a cellar night spot that had known better days. Her voice had known better days, too, but Mona wasn't up there in that blue spot because of her voice.

She filled glossy silk to overflowing, and the night people sprinkled around the tables sipped their liquor and pawed her with their eyes.

She was backed up by a horse voice fiddle and a blaring trumpet, and the dingy grin of the piano sounded like some of its teeth were loose.

End of the line, Mona thought bitterly.

She still looked well when the lights were blue but she aged like a winter leaf when the lights turned white again. She knew it. Mona was a realist, if nothing else. Her skin, once so much silk, had begun to fray around the eyes.

She knew that, too.

Forty two already. Over the hill. Singing in dumps when she used to make the ritzy spots look good. The whole rotten crowd out there wasn't worth a thousand bucks. Old, Old. The sex kitten had become a cat. It was a thought that twisted her lips. The rich men shooed her off their laps. She paid her own rent now. So there wasn't

much of a future to her future anymore, in a manner of speaking.

It was time to smarten up.

Not that little Mona was sick with worry.

After all, she always knew she could do it if she *had* to.

That is, she knew she was *capable* of doing it. But it was so much cleverer to get someone else to do it *for* you, wasn't it? That was the clever way, all right. And when you're aging and your beauty is crumbling forever and you're down to one mink stole and only three good dresses and the Boss is looking for a younger chick and says so, it's time to be very clever, isn't it?

Of course.

It was the wrong time for Charlie Forbes to walk in for a drink.

Good Time Charlie, everybody called him. Anything-for-a-laugh-Charlie, even if the laugh was on him. What a pity that he talked so much. What a pity that Mona heard him talking.

Her song over, Mona smiled at some polite applause and mingled with the men at the bar. At first, she hardly noticed Charlie, a big man drinking amid a cluster of friends.

"So I got this here job as night watchman, see?" A beer went down fast and he wiped gratefully at his lips. "Like I said, fellas, night watchman. And you know why they hired me?"

A laugh boomed out of Charlie.

"Because of my face. Hell, they

figure if I can't stop them with a gun, I'll scare them away with my face!"

A night watchman. The fact lodged itself in Mona's brain. She paid close attention to him now.

"Must be three hundred people working there." Another beer tilted and brought a sigh of pleasure. "Makes for a fat payroll, all right. But me, I'm snug as a bug in a rug. A tank couldn't knock down those doors to that building. Solid steel. Hah, I wish someone would try." The big laugh boomed again. "I get bored out there in that big building all by myself!"

Charlie's face startled Mona. It had ex pug pounded all over it. The nose was a smear and there was a shiny scar tissue around his eyes. Something writhed inside her at the sight of him. A couple of beers and the fool babbled like a brook.

A night watchman, he'd said. Three hundred people working there.

Mmmm.

Now isn't that a juicy tidbit for little Mona?

Figure everybody took home say, seventy, eighty bucks. Say seventy. Seventy times three hundred. That comes to, let's see now, twenty one thousand bucks.

Cash.

And it was guarded by a couple of steel doors and an ape faced, loose mouthed chump named Charlie.

Mona, she told herself, it's time for you to get very clever.

It was easy for her, easy as taking off a bra.

Charlie had the numb look of a man who couldn't believe his good fortune when she sidled over toward him after a while. The baby blue eyes pried him loose of his friends, and he followed the silken sway of her to a quiet booth where they could be alone.

It was a triumph for the ugly man. She knew he enjoyed being seen with her. More exactly, he enjoyed having been chosen by her. The fact was Charlie's heart was as battered as his face. He was forty seven lonely years old. Always crowded about by men, he was an island as far as women were concerned.

No woman had ever wanted to go there.

And so she won him easily over a period of time, like chess moves. Chess moves. Apt, that. Because Mona moved slowly and thoughtfully, making her kisses live even though inside her she writhed at the touch of him.

But she could put up with that, even that, for twenty one thousand bucks.

She married Charlie exactly two months and three weeks and two days later.

"I want the best for you, Mona," Charlie told her. He saw her smile but not the grin sheathed within it. She could be a dewy eyed, dear lit-

tle thing if she wanted to be. "I only take home eighty-five a week but I can get myself a fighter, see? A good boy. I can train him see? I can teach him plenty about fightin'. Sure, I'll get myself a piece of a winner. And then I'll get you a mink stole and diamonds like I wanta!"

He made a fist and it quivered with resolve.

"You'll see, Mona, you'll see . . ."

She was, according to plan, a model wife.

She went into his dreary bachelor apartment and made it gleam and clicked big with the neighbors. In the months that passed, no one could say a thing against her. There was never a quarrel between them, never a loud word. Never.

And she cooed over the dirty kids on the dirty street and always had a hot supper for him and everybody said that ex pug Charlie Forbes was one helluva lucky fella.

She was very careful all the way. On one occasion, a straying husband strayed for one of her curves and got slapped down like a gnat. No one could point a finger at her. It was something the police would be told later on.

After the murder.

But the most carefully oiled plans grind their gears once in a while. And the same thing happened to Mona.

In his outgoing and happy way,

Charlie brought an unexpected guest home for dinner.

Grimes.

Edward Andrew Grimes, to be exact. A detective. But not the usual movie star cop with curly hair and wall to wall shoulders. He was a thin faced, gaunt bodied man in a worn suit and he barely reached Charlie's shoulder. He was fifty two years old but his eyes were much, much older. You knew this cop had seen too much. Smiles were unnatural to him but he managed to warm one for this occasion.

"Meet the new Missus, Grimes. Nice little armful, eh?" He nudged Grimes with a wise elbow. "And she can cook, *too!*"

Mona felt Grimes study her, index her and file her away in his mind.

"Grimes here is a bachelor, Mona." Charlie rattled on. "So I thought I'd give him a break and let him taste some home cooking. Don't let him scare you, Sweetheart. He's not as sour as he looks. All butter inside. Give a guy his last buck. We been pals for years. He knew me when I was fighting. Say, I wasn't half bad, was I Grimes?"

Grimes opined quietly that he'd been pretty good.

But Charlie wasn't listening. He picked Mona up and whirled her around and kissed her profusely on the neck.

"Imagine a doll like this marryin' a mug like me! What about

that, Grimes, old boy, what about that?"

"Your little doll," Mona scolded, "should have been told we were having company."

"Yeah, sure." Charlie scratched his head with puzzled fingers. "How'd I forget?" He shook his head dolefully. "Maybe I took too many punches, eh, Grimes?"

Mona was no secret to Grimes. She knew it and could live with it. You had to be stupid to try to fool this sharp eyed cop. He'd seen washed up dolls before. She knew what he was thinking. If this was a lovenest only one bird was really cooing, but if that made Charlie Boy happy, why throw the book at her? Take ten years away and Charlie wouldn't get close. She was a broad way past her prime, a filly slowing down in the stretch, and with age creeping up on her, she had to come in out of the rain somewhere.

Case closed.

Eyeing him, Mona knew he understood. She handled Grimes like Dresden glass. She gave him a haystack of spaghetti spiced with sauce and kept his beer glass full. There was much talk about Charlie's fights and how he took Billy Silk in seven and Gunboat Malloy in three and how he would have been Champ except for those deep cuts around his eyes.

Grimes feasted and drank with Mona eagerly around him. She remembered some good jokes that

had the table roaring. Grimes had to admit that he hadn't laughed so much in years. He finally said goodbye with reluctance, knowing bleakly that a bachelor apartment waited for him.

The evening was a success. The first moments of awkwardness had been washed away with the third can of beer. True, she'd have to keep an eye on him. But so far, so perfect. He'd stayed a long time and hadn't wanted to leave. Mmm. She thought about that awhile, a smile tugging at her lips.

She decided to have the detective over often. A good touch that. It amused her. The killer, the victim and the cop having a weekly social. Like the rest, he'd taken her for a stupid, blue eyed doll, good for a meal and a roll in the hay. That's what he thought. That's what they all thought. She'd handle them, all right. And when she did what she finally was going to do, these two chumps would never know what hit them.

Okay, chapter two . . . a very interesting chapter.

It was also something that had been going on very discretely for some time now.

Mona's visits to a plush hotel room on the east side of town would have stunned Charlie. An unclad young man idled on his bed as usual, waiting for her. He was a little annoyed because she was a half hour late this time.

He had the unlikely name of Clarence Crump, and if you like a girl's face on a man, he was good looking. He had oil slick hair, carefully preened, and doll blue eyes and the soft hands of a woman.

Clarence preened his hands as diligently as he preened his hair. He felt he had to. Their rare skill had to be preserved. There wasn't a safe made that they couldn't crack. He'd been up against the best and he'd opened them like walnuts. Open sesame. He had the touch, all right.

The only problem was to find a safe worth opening.

Mona entered his swanky room through an unlocked door, her breasts brazen in her dress. Clarence was eager for her and she burned him with kiss after kiss and then wrenched free of him, her eyes keeping him at bay.

She was Boss.

"Maybe I ought to let you crack that safe by yourself!"

"Don't be a fool. We need each other, Lover Boy. That safe is a sitting duck. A chump is watching it. It's in a big building way out in the sticks with not a cop around for miles. You gonna walk out on that, Lover Boy?"

He relaxed on a rumpled bed and ripped open a fresh pack of cigarettes. He shook a few loose like fingers and he took one with his lips. He lit it with a tear drop of flame flicked out of a silver lighter.

His eyes never left her face.

"When," he wanted to know, "do I get at that safe?"

"When I tell you. It'll be soon now, less than two weeks. Think I want to wait? Think I don't want that dough in my hands? More than twenty thousand bucks. How about that, Lover Boy?"

"I'll tell you when I see it."

"You'll see it, all right. You'll need a blackjack, a heavy one. And you'd better be good with it, Lover Boy."

He puffed his cigarette and spewed smoke and said, "Try me."

"The safe is guarded by an ex pug. One of his fists is as big as your face. If he hits you, you won't be pretty anymore."

"I'll take my chances."

She laughed out loud.

"That's just it, Lover Boy. We won't be taking any chances, either of us. The big lug loves me. I'm his pwetty, liddle Mona. The god-dam fool is my husband. I'll call him first, tell him some guy tried to rip off my dress. I'll be as weepy as a soap opera. I'll tell him I've got to see him, be with him. He'll open those doors to that building nice as you please."

"Sounds neat."

"After I'm in there, I'll leave the door open an inch or two for you. You've got to be thirty seconds behind me. He'll be so busy taking care of weepy little me, he won't know what day it is. I've been planning this a long time, Lover Boy."

"Looks it."

"The big lug likes to make love to my neck. It takes all kinds, eh, Clarence? When you come in, his back will be to the door. You get a free shot with that blackjack. I wouldn't miss, was I you."

"I won't miss."—evenly.

"Fine. That takes care of business. Now for pleasure." She smiled at him. "I was only fooling a little while ago." She took the cigarette from his lips and put a long kiss there. "Have you got a little time for Mona, Lover Boy?"

He had time.

At eleven o'clock on the night of October 28th, Mona sent Charlie to work with a very special lingering kiss. He felt it all the way to his heart and began to gush kisses on her neck. She writhed at the ugly feel of him and was glad in an iron, merciless way that this was the last time she would have to put up with it.

Charlie left with a happy wave of his hand.

Rid of him, Mona got down to business.

The well oiled scheme began to move—according to plan.

She called Clarence from a public phone and instructed him to steal a car, to fill it with gas, and to pick her up at the Shelby Theatre exactly at midnight, not a minute before or a minute after. It was to be a new fast car. She had the tone of a sergeant barking orders to the

troops. He didn't like it but he kept his mouth shut.

He was also to get a suitcase, any kind as long as it was large, to stash the cash in.

She described herself as wearing a black faille suit with matching gloves and a silver stole. The theatre district would be crowded but she'd be easy to find, mostly because of that stole. If he needed a drink, he could take one or two but no more. And he was to drive slow and easy like there was no place to go, did he get it?

He got it.

At exactly ten forty six P.M. the lone attendant at the Midtown Parking lot fell under a vicious blow from a blackjack—according to plan. Above him, Clarence's lips curved in a grin. Bullseye. He'd watched this lot and the back of that guy's juicy head for weeks now. According to plan.

He found a sixty one Olds, black and shiny like it just rolled out of the showroom. He tossed an alligator grip, mouth gaping for money, into the back seat, and roared away from there, the grin spreading on his face.

The plan was ticking like a watch.

He moved the Olds through light traffic, black gloves deft and sure at the wheel. He opened the dashboard glove compartment and found a half filled bottle of bourbon. Convenient, though this was not according to plan. He took a

couple of swallows for luck, wiping his lips with his sleeve. The grin, a little moist now, stayed on his face all the way to Mona.

With that silver stole around her shoulders, she was easy to find.

He opened the door and plucked her out of the theatre crowds and wormed his way through thickening traffic to the outskirts of town. A light rain began to fall and Mona was grateful for it. Rain washed people off the streets. Good. The rain freckled the windshield and the wipers skimmed them away and counted the seconds for her.

Swish, swish. Swish, swish. Like the ticking of a clock. Like the ticking of a scheme.

Neither one of them said anything. The route was prearranged. They'd been over it many times. They stopped once at a roadside phone booth where Mona made an urgent call to Charlie. It worked. She grinned all the way back to the car. The time was twelve-fifteen. According to plan, he'd be dead by twelve forty-five.

Mona lit a cigarette coolly. Clarence's brow showed a slight glitter of sweat. Of fear. But she was as relaxed as a matron on her way to a cup of tea. A small, beaded purse lay in her lap. She touched it and a smile played with her lips. A small blue gun slept inside it.

But not for long.

The city streets fled under the wheels and the roads were rougher now. They were close enough to

cut their lights. The warehouse loomed ahead, a solid brick structure straddling a lonely block. Green eyelids shrouded all its eyes except for one lemon yellow square of light. The office. Charlie's office.

The Olds made a sleek shadow at the curb. Sweat trickled on Clarence's face now. He mopped at it with his sleeve. He felt for the blackjack in his slash pocket. Some kind of brutal strength within it flowed upward through his body, steadying him. He took it out. It dangled now in a fierce leather fist.

Mona got out of the car alone and climbed four stone steps to that yellow window. She shouted Charlie's name again and again. Anguished. Broken. Those cries melted the steel doors to that building. They parted for her and she rushed inside.

"Mona, Mona." She was in his arms trembling, sobbing. "I couldn't wait for you to get here, Baby. Who was it? Who hurt you, Baby? I'll tear him into little pieces. Nobody's going to hurt my Mona, nobody . . ."

It was ridiculously easy for her. He forgot completely about that open door. He kissed her and stroked her hair with love and the kisses trailed down her face to her neck. Inside, she exulted. She moved back, back into the office, turning slightly, cradling his head for the blow.

Clarence moved in, soundless and swift, and the back of Charlie's

head loomed, and he grinned because he loved this so much, and the grin spread crazily as the blackjack struck.

The blow flicked the switch from white to black for Charlie's life forever.

Mona reeled under him, his face burning her shoulder. And she leaped away as from the feel of slime as he went headlong and face down in front of her.

"More!" she rasped. "More, more!"

The blackjack obeyed her, the blows merciless at that stricken head. And then Clarence rose, drained of strength, his face bloodless and streaming sweat. His hand hung like a rag. The blackjack fell from it.

It was the first time he'd killed. He couldn't take his eyes off that battered head. He moved back, back, without knowing it, his legs almost dying and bringing him down.

Mona took charge savagely. She slapped his face, hard. She left white lines on it. She beat at it again and again. His legs snapped like broken toothpicks and he fell and crawled while she jeered high above him.

It took several minutes to steady him with ample assistance from the bottle in the car.

She steered him to the safe. It was squat and thick and tough. He wiped off some icy sweat, feeling better now. This was more in his

line. Those skillful hands of his quickly shed their leather skins. He turned the dials this way and that, his ear flat to the safe, listening to its ticking heart.

Minutes passed, three, four, five, six. Mona was so much stone, watching, waiting.

The thick steel safe that could have shed rifle bullets broke under those knowing hands. A grin stretched on Clarence's lips as the tumblers clicked and the mute safe gave up its secret and its hoard.

At twelve minutes to one the safe hung openmouthed for the killers.

Clarence bolted to the car for the alligator grip. They filled it almost to the brim with wild hands, and Clarence hauled it outside and tossed it into the trunk of the Olds.

He didn't go back.

Mona let the blackjack lie where it fell. She took a last look at Charlie, lips twisting. And then she opened her purse and removed a snub nosed, fat bellied blue .32. She flicked the chamber open and studied the dull, brassy gleam of the bullets. A matching gleam was in her eyes. She put the gun back, left the light on, and closed the steel doors quietly behind her.

Mona took the wheel. Lover Boy was in no condition to drive. She smiled a mirthless smile. One o'clock and it was over—according to plan. Charlie was dead—according to plan. And the money was in that grip—according to plan.

But there was more to her plan.

The black Olds was a sleek bullet fired through the night.

The sun rose brightly the next morning flooding the apartment of Angelo Minelli, a widower. He drank some lonely orange juice, ate one soft boiled lonely egg, and drained a lonely cup of coffee.

And then Angelo Minelli, who never had had his name in the newspapers in his life before, reported for work as a track walker.

It was Minelli who found the naked body of Clarence Crump at a stop sign near the railroad tracks.

The police figure a grim game was played before he died.

They were right.

She made him strip off his clothes which she later burned. The gun made him obey. It turned him into quaking jelly. He tried to say something but he couldn't talk, his mouth gaping like a hooked fish.

The train she was waiting for came by at one twenty-three in the morning. It drowned the crash of the bullets, according to plan. Bullet after bullet caught his face and turned his prettiness into a ghastly smear. It gave the cops a faceless, naked corpse to worry about.

According to plan.

SHE could really act.

It was a tear stained Mona who opened the door when Grimes came calling. She even welcomed him. No killer had ever been more confident. The boy was good and dead and so was Charlie. The mon-

ey was in the grip stashed away in a locker at the Railway Station. The car had been abandoned in the heart of town.

Let the copper prow.

Still, there was something funny about his eyes. It chilled her just a little. But then she shook it off. He'd lost his best friend and the cop wasn't feeling so good. So he had eyes like ice, so what? What could he prove? What could he even suspect?

"Charlie loved you, Mona."

Was it the way he said it that bothered her? The chill she felt crawled slowly on her flesh.

Grimes sat down heavily on a kitchen chair, his hands dangling through his lap. It was as if she weren't even in the room.

"He used to talk to me about the money in the safe. If he could only steal some of it, he said. For you. If he could only borrow a fistful and buy a new stole. For you, Mona, for you."

"Is that all you can do, Grimes, come in here at a time like this and tear my heart out?"

"The doors to that building were opened from the inside."

"So what?"

"Charlie opened them."

"I don't get it."

"The question is, Mona, who'd he open those doors *for*?"

It stopped her cold. For the first time, a little trickle of fear went down her spine.

Grimes lit a cigarette and took a

drag low in his lungs and let out a blue sigh. He leaned back in his chair. A vein of smoke wrinkled off his cigarette and he watched it with extraordinary absorption. Like he'd never seen smoke rise from a cigarette before.

The icy casual cop began to get to her nerves. Did he know something? What could he know, what? So he'd opened up those doors for someone, so what? It could have been anybody. Any face in a city full of faces. He'd always blabbed in bars about all that cash in the safe. Everybody knew that, even Grimes, his old buddy boy.

So where'd he get off coming here and beating her up with those lousy cop eyes of his?

"Did you call him, Mona?" — softly.

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"Did you tell him you were sick? Did you tell him you had to see him?" The questions were quick and harsh and edged with hate. "What was the excuse, Mona? That a guy grabbed you? Is that what you told him?"

Grimes rose, something merciless in his visage making her back away from him.

"There's something you forgot, Mona. Charlie was a lonely man. He'd only open up those doors for someone he loved. And he loved only two people in the world—you, Mona, and me. And I wasn't there, Mona."

"Neither was I!"

"Who killed him, Mona? Who did the dirty work?"

She told him he was crazy, wild. She raged at him but his eyes never changed and a grin opened on his face, toying with her, taunting her.

That grin drove her back, back, back. A wall stopped her. She knocked a picture from it and it crashed on its glass face. One hand rose and trembled at her lips.

"You were the bait," Grimes told her evenly. "Someone else was the killer. 'S matter, you don't feel too good? We'll find him,—if he's alive. We'll find the money, too." His tone and his eyes hated her. "It was all real easy for you, wasn't it, Mona?"

"I tell you—"

"Because Charlie was a sucker for you. Know something, Mona? Love isn't just blind—it's dumb. That's why he let you in. That's why you could set him up for that blackjack. That's why a good guy lost his life."

Again, a cold crawl of fear moved on Mona's flesh. She shivered. He knew something *else*, this rotten, grinning cop. But what? Think!

She didn't have time to think.

Grimes didn't give her time. He saw her cracking like thin ice and he enjoyed that, he enjoyed that very much. Her anguish was a feast for him. And what he told her doomed her and he knew it, the grin huge and hating on his face.

"Charlie was a fighter, Mona. He cut like paper, especially around the eyes. The blow that killed him smashed his face against someone's shoulder—a woman's shoulder. We know that. We know too that she was wearing a silver mink stole. We found bits of fur in those open cuts. They'll match your stole—ten to one on that!"

She stared at him.

"Where's your stole, Mona? Eh? Let's find it. Eh? Ten to one I find it, Mona. Ten to one it's got a little bit of Charlie's blood on it. And ten to one it sends you straight to the electric chair!"

She flung herself at him, desperate, screaming, kicking, her nails slashing for his eyes.

Grimes could move. He'd done this kind of thing many times before. He wrapped her up like a candybox using manacles for string. He didn't even lose his

breath. He knew where the nerve centers of the body were and he struck and struck, harshly. Her face turned to ashes. Her legs and arms went numb and she collapsed loosely like a doll of rags.

Ten months, three weeks and two days later, Mona went to her death.

Her face was bloodless, her figure wasted, all bravado gone as they moved her to the chair. They were efficient, swift. The time was 11:02. They strapped her and fixed the plates and the electrodes and dropped the mask, silent men moving in silence. The time was 11:04.

A signal went out to an unseen switch. The current struck and her body strained and writhed, hands aghast, hands dying, hands curling like burning paper. She was pronounced dead at 11:08.

According to plan.



PAUL acknowledged the wave of the guard with a quick nod then settled back to watch the reflection of the prison grow dim in the rear view mirror. It was more curiosity than emotion which compelled him to watch it, for there was none of the glow of freedom he had expected. As the car pulled away from the high iron gate and angled on to the highway, the last thing he saw of San Quentin was the tall gas chamber exhaust chimney, but even this left him unmoved.

His wife drove awkwardly through the heavy traffic, talking all

the time. He had managed effectively until then to close out her voice and to dwell on his own quiet thoughts, but now her falsetto knifed through even them.

"Oh, daddy, you're free! It's all over. I'm going to fix a big dinner for you with all the things you like and I'm going to treat you like a king. I'm so excited . . ."

He shut out the sound again and gazed from the window at the passing scene. It was winter and the hills of Marin were robed in deep color. How starkly they would have contrasted with the gray of condemned row, and how much he had

BY
AL
MARTINEZ

STAY OF EXECUTION

"Why do you want to remember all of that, Paul? Isn't it enough to have gone through it? You're free now. Leave it alone . . . Leave it alone!"

wanted to see them when he was awaiting what until this moment had seemed inevitable. The barred windows high above the steel floor of the cell had afforded only a view of sky, and for all of his concentrating Paul had been unable to recreate the deep rolling hills around the prison, a scene which he had thought indelibly printed on his mind, since he had assumed it would be his last view of the outside world.

But Paul had not begrudged his bad memory. For what little of the outside he had remembered had been gratifying, for up until he had entered San Quentin he could recall painfully little of what went before. The scenes of Death Row were sharp enough, though. Could he ever forget the wild last screams of little Bennie as they dragged him away? Could he shut out the anguished prayers of Jose as he was led, a man in a trance, to the gas chamber? No, never.

Paul turned to his wife. "How did it happen?" he asked simply.

She stopped talking abruptly and glanced at him. "What, daddy? How did what happen?"

It annoyed him to explain. "How did I get free?"

"Why, you're innocent! The lawyer told them that, daddy, that's all. He showed where that evil judge was wrong!"

It was no use. He saw a drugstore and asked her to stop the car, ignoring her demands for an ex-

planation. He got out long enough to buy a newspaper and thumbed through the pages as they drove.

Paul found what he wanted on an inside page. The story began, "Convicted killer Paul Hunt, 41, will be released today from Death Row and from San Quentin Prison on the basis of a State Supreme Court ruling which found him convicted on insufficient evidence. He was to be granted freedom exactly one week away from his scheduled date with the gas chamber.

"Hunt, found guilty by a jury for the murder of Dora Morley, was ordered freed after the state attorney general's office notified the court that it would not appeal reversal of the lower court's decision.

"The High Tribunal found the strength of circumstantial evidence insufficient to warrant the death penalty and in a surprising move offered the opinion that on the basis of the sparse, circumstantial evidence, a new trial would be tantamount to double jeopardy."

He stopped reading and folded the newspaper in his lap. That's all he wanted to know. It was easier not to force himself to try to remember more by reading the other details. In prison once he had attempted total recall, but it had ended in total darkness, a cold, terrifying void that threw only flecks of light at him, but gave him no hint to the past which had been blotted out.

They arrived at their flat and she rushed him inside. The cool air

of November stopped at the doorway. Once inside, a heavy mustiness clogged his nostrils. Breathing became difficult and the palms of his hands perspired. The drab walls of the front room closed like the sides of a box around him and he longed for the thin, bright winter.

But instead of bolting, he sat heavily upon the flowered pattern of the couch, manufactured a smile and nodded woodenly, a gesture that meant to say that it was good to be home. But it wasn't. The choking atmosphere panicked him and he realized that it was an old feeling, something out of the world of long ago that he despised. In a way, he longed for the spotless conformity of the prison, a sameness that was comforting, a bareness that had relaxed him.

His wife hurried into the kitchen and came back, an apron cinched around her thick waist, to announce that he must relax while she fixed him a king's dinner. She smiled coyly and kneeled at his feet to pull off his shoes, although he did not want them off. Then she brought him a drink he had no stomach for. He sat in the raw sound of her off-tune hum from the kitchen and studied the amber fluid.

Once alone, Paul thought about things. He felt a strange stirring in a corner of his mind the deeper into his thoughts that he delved. He tensed in a posture of concentration to encourage it. It came slowly, gathering pieces of darkness into

shape and color. He saw himself, relaxed and smiling, walking through the soft glow of a cocktail lounge, heading for something or someone, striding easily past round glass-topped tables, the gentle aroma of perfume around him; he wondered where he was going and felt impatient, frightened, then terrified, suddenly running swiftly through the lounge, calling. If only he could remember . . .

"You haven't touched your drink, daddy, and I've had three already. Now you just pick it up and I'll sit here with you."

He turned dimly from the vapor of his day-dream to the substance of his wife.

She forced the drink into his hand, touching him. He took the glass and quickly pulled it away. He didn't want to touch her. The warm flesh of her hand repulsed him. He smiled uneasily and sipped the alcohol. It traced a line of warmth through him and burned in the pit of his stomach. His inclination was to throw it at her, to smash her and run . . . run through the afternoon and into the evening until there was darkness and nothing more. But he didn't know why.

"It's so good to have you home, daddy," she purred.

She sat next to him on the sofa and pressed heavily against his arm. He wanted to move away, but there was no place for him to go. She leaned closer, her breath warm and

whiskey-sour against the side of his face. Then she turned his head and kissed him fully on the lips, turning to face him, pressing in eagerly.

Paul bolted to his feet, and as he did his glass fell to the floor, spilling the drink across the rug.

"I'm . . . I'm sorry."

Darkness flashed across her face, but was quickly replaced by a fixed smile.

"Poor daddy, that's all right. Mommy will clean it up."

"I'm tired, I guess . . . very tired."

"Mommy understands her little man. I'll clean it . . ."

He watched her leave the room and then fell heavily back on the sofa, stretching out. She came back, sponged the spilled liquor and touched him gently on the chest.

"It's all right, daddy. It's all right."

He turned his face away, tense to what might happen next. She took her hand from him and left the room.

"Dinner will be ready pretty quick," she called back. "You rest, daddy."

Paul plunged his face into the darkness of a pillow. Lights danced before his eyes and he sought futilely to focus on them. Unsuccessful, he at last gave up and let himself drift.

A feeling of guilt overwhelmed him. Why could he not stand to have her touch him? Had it always been this way? They had been mar-

ried a long time, he knew that. He couldn't remember how long, for that too was lost somewhere behind him. But she was his wife, and a distant effort to remember trimmed her figure and put youth into the face he fashioned in his mind. She had been different before. He looked hard at the face until it blurred with the strain, then started to come back again, first twisted in rage, then blanked out so that last of all it wasn't her face at all, but a face he wanted desperately to remember, a face that took his breath away, a dim, fleeting memory.

At length, he fell exhausted from the effort to remember. The blurred image faded and was gone.

Then he thought about the prison and wondered why he had been so unconcerned during his stay there. If it hadn't been for her, he would still be there, a small, silent figure in a single cell, awaiting his doom with disinterest. It had seemed right that he be there, and he felt now that he should return. It wasn't only the inability to remember that made life empty and useless for him. It was something else, something having to do with the half-remembered face.

"Almost ready, daddy," she called again. "You wash up."

He rose obediently from the sofa and walked into their bedroom. He looked around, remembering each item as he saw it, but unable to grasp the total picture. He took off

his shirt then headed to the adjoining bathroom where he washed. Then he returned to the bedroom.

Paul decided to wear another shirt and opened a drawer in a dresser he felt instinctively was his. He touched the clothes in it as though they would magically impart memory to him, then gave up and reached underneath the clothing on top for a white shirt. His hand touched something, and instead of bringing out the shirt he pulled a locket from the drawer. He looked at it briefly, decided it must be his wife's and set it atop the dresser. Then he found a shirt, put it on and walked into the dining room.

The table was set with candles, a new cloth and new dishes and silverware. He sat down at once and waited. His wife came in and served him.

"Steak, tossed green salad, French-fried potatoes and after that, lemon pie—all of the things you like, daddy. But first," she opened and filled his glass then hers, "champagne. To your homecoming, my little man."

He wasn't hungry, and the last thing he wanted was liquor. But he lifted the glass, touched hers then sipped. Something told him that he should do as she had planned. Something warned him.

"You *are* my little man." It was half-statement, half-threat.

Paul looked quickly at his wife. Her eyes were narrow and there was malice buried deep in the smile.

They remained at silent impasse, then abruptly the mood passed, and she settled her bulk into her chair, talking happily.

He glanced at her occasionally as they ate, and the candles between them gave her face a blurred, unreal look. If only he could put the pieces together, everything would be all right. If he could reconstruct the moment of the crime he had almost died for, it might reawaken all of his memory. Perhaps . . .

"Elizabeth," he said gently, "help me remember."

She stopped eating and grinned across the table.

"Why do you want to remember, daddy?"

There it was again, the quick stab of malice.

"I must know what happened."

"Nobody knows what happened, dear. Just eat. Don't worry about it. Mommy will take care of you all the rest of your life. You're mine, daddy, all mine."

"Yes, of course, but I have to know . . ."

She put her fork down and chewed heavily until all of the food was gone from her mouth.

"Nobody knows, daddy. Nobody knows. This woman was killed. She was a prostitute, probably. Yes, a no-good prostitute. They found her in her hotel room and you were in the hotel lobby, just standing there, daddy, and there was some blood on your clothes."

"Blood?"

"Specks of it, daddy. But I know what happened. I know you must have been in some kind of accident, and wandered into the hotel for help. Maybe you were robbed. Yes, I think someone robbed you when you were coming home from work. That's on the way home, you know. Yes, you were robbed and wandered into the hotel with blood on your clothes and they saw you there and arrested you. That's what happened. You were hit on the head and lost your memory. Poor daddy."

It didn't satisfy him, but he did not pursue the subject. Later he asked, "Her name was Dora Morley?"

"That's right, daddy, you read it in the newspaper, didn't you? Dora Morley a prostitute, that's all."

Dora Morley. Dorie. Dor. The names tumbled through his mind then faded like sound in the distance. Dark hair, deep green eyes, like the hills of Marin, a quick, faint smile, gentle hands. He had stopped eating in mid-motion to remember this piece of the past, his fork before his mouth. He put it down.

"What did they say in court? How did they convict me?"

His wife sighed heavily and wiped the edge of her mouth with a napkin, daintily, timidly. But while there was timidity in her mannerism, Paul perceived a danger behind her patient smile.

"Why do you want to remember all of that, Paul? Isn't it enough to have gone through it? You're free

now. You lived through horrible days, up there on that row waiting to die. Leave it alone . . . leave it alone."

But he could not. Night came. After dinner he sat down again in the frontroom and listened to music from the radio. Then he rose restlessly and while his wife washed the dishes he stepped out on to the porch. The lights of the city were in full blaze, reflecting against an icy sky. Dora. Dorie. Dor. If only he could remember. A hotel, a walk down a long hall, a door opened by a man bright with anticipation . . . Is that me? Am I opening the door? Am I walking into the room? Me, Paul Hunt? Then the vision destroyed itself, as all of his bits of memory did, until the last blurred impression was two faces—one his wife, the other . . .

Dora.

It came to him in a brilliant flash of clarity. And as he associated the name with the face, it was brought into full, hard focus, a face as dear to him as anything could be, a gentle, radiant face. He had been with her. He had known her. He had . . . and here his memory failed again.

Paul buried his face in his hands. He wanted to cry out in frustration and anguish, but he could not. He wanted to scream, but he dared not. Then, finally drained of the will to voice his torment, he lifted his face again to the lights. "Dora", he said simply.

"Daddy . . ."

His wife's call drifted out to him. He turned listlessly and walked into the house. Only the bedroom light remained bright. He shuddered at the thought, but turned toward it without breaking stride.

She was already in bed, the blankets pulled kittenishly up to her chin, her thick bare arms and her face exposed.

"It's bed time," she said coyly.

Paul nodded. He kicked off his slippers then slowly unbuttoned his shirt, appalled at what the night would hold, frightened of the strangling, sweaty darkness that would close in about them. He put the shirt on the dresser and noticed that the locket he had set there earlier was gone.

"You found the locket," he said, for something to say.

The angry expression flashed again across her face. "Locket?"

"I found it in my drawer. I put it there." He pointed to the dresser top.

"There was no locket, daddy."

"But there was . . ."

"No." Her voice was crisp with subdued rage. "Come to bed. I want you by me. I want you next to me, close to me. You're my little man."

But now he responded with anger of his own. "No."

"Daddy, I want . . ."

"No!"

The prospect that even this close span of his memory was being destroyed frightened Paul and he reacted strongly to it.

"I put a locket there, on the dresser. I know I did. Where is it?"

The air was heavy with silence.

"Oh, yes," she said finally. "Now I remember. Goodness, daddy, my memory is getting bad too. Yes, you put it there. It was my old locket."

"Then there was one?"

"Yes, now I remember."

Some of the fright left him.

"Where is it? I want to touch it. To make certain . . ."

"I put it away, daddy. Let's not bother with it *now*."

"I must touch it, Elizabeth. Then . . . then everything will be all right. Then I'll be with you."

Dora. Dorie. Dor. Why did the names race through his mind? Why did they trigger an emptiness in him? What had she meant to him?

"All right, daddy. It's in that little jewel box in the top right-hand drawer. You touch it, daddy. Touch it if you want. Then put it right back. Then come to bed."

He opened the drawer and pulled out the box. He reached inside of it for the locket, a tiny heart on a thin gold chain. He held it for a moment, satisfied that it was real, that he had not lost that part of his memory anyhow, content that he was not dreaming up the existence of real things.

He meant to put it back right away. But his fingers opened it. Dora's picture stared back at him.

"Elizabeth!"

His shout rang through the room and he dropped the locket.

"It's her! The dead girl! It's Dora . . . Dorie . . ."

His wife bolted upright in the bed, the blankets falling away from her nightgown, her eyes bright with rage.

"I told you to just touch it! Why did you open it? Why couldn't you leave well enough alone!"

He had backed against a wall, his face drawn and pale. She still sat up in bed, her heavy body tensed forward, her bosom heaving.

"I did know her," he said vacantly. "I loved her. You lied to me, Elizabeth. I did kill her! *I killed Dorie.*"

His wife stared quizzically at him, but he lost her face in a rush of memory that showed him over Dora, his vision blurred by tears, calling her name, touching her lifeless body.

"I went to see her that night. Something happened. What? Tell me! Did she want to leave me? Did she want me to stop cheating on you? *What happened?*"

"Poor daddy," she said. "You really don't remember."

The smile on his wife's face no longer made pretense of warmth.

Malice was chiseled across her mouth, deep-set in her eyes.

"You really don't remember."

She whipped the covers away and pushed herself to her feet, standing before a table lamp, the only light in the room, her bulk framed by its hostile incandescence.

"Look, daddy, look closely. I'm not as pretty as she was, but don't you see something familiar? The nightgown, daddy, the pale blue, frilly nightgown. Like she wore, daddy, every time you met her. Like I found her when I followed you."

Now he remembered, now he knew. That night in Dora's apartment. Dora had been dressed in the blue gown when he arrived, a gown that would be imprinted forever now on his mind. But she had worn it in death and it had been torn to shreds on her lithe body. She was that way, on the floor, when he had entered her room. And his wife, her eyes ablaze with the murder she had just committed, had been hulking over the woman he loved. She had killed Dora.

"Now, daddy," she said, slipping back under the covers. "Let's forget all about it. Come to bed, daddy."



Family

Argument

It was getting dark and cold, so he was grateful for the ride. Even though the Haskells did nothing but argue the whole trip.

BY NEAL CURTIS

IT WAS almost ten miles to town, but if I'd known what kind of a ride it was going to be, I'd rather have walked. Much rather.

There hadn't been much traffic, and now a sort of bluish haze was settling over the fields and dusk was closing down around me. When I heard the sound of an approaching car, traveling in the same direction I was hiking, I twisted around, and more from force of habit than from hope of getting a ride, I wig-wagged with my thumb.

It was a fairly late model sedan;

not new, but about a '55. Actually, I don't even remember the make, or the color; I was too anxious to hop in the back seat when the mild-looking, middle-aged man behind the wheel braked to a stop, and cheerfully motioned for me to join them.

The 'them' consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Haskell. I thanked Mr. Haskell for stopping. "My name is Bob—Bob Keenan," I added, relaxing against the cushions. "It was getting sort of chilly and there hasn't been a car along this road for nearly an hour," I said. "If you

hadn't been good enough to stop, I might have had to walk all the way."

While I was talking, Mr. Haskell darted a nervous, quick glance at the stiffly erect bulk of the gray-haired lady beside him. His wife hadn't even moved since I'd climbed in back. I wondered if she was afraid of me, the way she was sitting, all tense and silent.

"Coming home from college for the weekend?" Mr. Haskell asked, pleasantly, without taking his gaze from the flat, winding gray concrete ribbon of highway.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, now, you just settle back and relax, young man." He sneaked another look at his wife. "We'll be home in about fifteen minutes, Ruby. You won't be happy about that, either, I imagine," he said, tiredly. "It took me sixteen years to find out that you're only happy when I'm completely miserable."

She didn't even seem to be listening to him. She just kept sitting there, staring straight ahead. I felt sort of embarrassed. They were in the middle of a family argument, and I sat slumped down in the corner, behind Mrs. Haskell. The best thing I could do was to remain quiet.

"Sixteen years, Ruby. Oh, I know you aren't even the least bit sorry; why should you be? When your first husband's bank account ran dry, there I was, a lonesome bachelor who'd turned forty, and

realized I needed *someone*. You never cared for me as a person, did you, Ruby? I was merely another bank-book; I've often wondered if you loved poor, dead Otto. Now I know you didn't; he was only the man who signed checks, just like me."

Through half-closed eyes, I could see that his wife resented that. She shifted away from him, slightly, and she continued to stare out through the windshield into the darkening dusk.

Mr. Haskell turned on the headlights. He eased up on the gas pedal, too. There were quite a few curves in the stretch of highway we were traveling now, and anyone who drives a car knows that the time between sunset and evening is the worst, the most dangerous time. We were on high ground, and in a few minutes, we'd be at the summit of Bleed's Hill. It was a tricky, constantly-winding section of blacktop, but I wasn't worried. Mr. Haskell handled the wheel like a man who'd done a lot of driving.

Even when he turned his thin, serious face a few inches, to briefly glance at his wife, he never lost sight of the pavement, and the sedan stayed well over in the right lane.

"Money doesn't last forever, Ruby. Didn't you know that?" he asked. His quiet voice was dull with sadness. "I tried to warn you. We could have managed very nicely on what I had put away, along with my pension checks. I tried. Yes, and it might have worked out for us,

if you weren't such a greedy, selfish creature."

Huddled there in the back seat, making myself a part of the shadows, I swallowed hard, several times. The muscles in my throat were tight, and if there had been some way to break into the conversation, to ask them to let me out, I would have. They shouldn't have stopped for me; I was a stranger, an intruder. Their quarrel didn't concern me, yet there I was, unable to do anything except listen.

"You look shocked. Are you surprised, hearing me talk like this, Ruby? Well, it surprised me, too. After so many years of letting you have your own way, I wasn't sure I had a mind of my own."

The road curved sharply to the right. Mr. Haskell guided the sedan around it, smoothly. "In a few more minutes, we'll be home," he said. His wife had swung around to face him. I could scarcely make out her sharply-defined features in the greenish glow from the dashboard, but her mouth was slightly open, ready to speak.

"That's right, Ruby. In a few minutes, you can go your way, and I'll go mine. Too bad, isn't it? I never intended things to end this way."

She leaned toward him, ready to protest. "No—it's too late to argue," Henry Haskell muttered, grimly, as he pushed her away from him. "There's nothing more to talk about, my dear."

I coughed. I couldn't help it; I just did. Mrs. Ruby Haskell's plump, bulky body twitched, startled. Her husband chuckled, noting her nervousness. "Settle back, Ruby," he said, gently showing her against the seat. His mild blue eyes twinkled amusedly as he twisted for a quick look at me.

"Are you comfortable, young man?" he inquired. "We're nearly to the city limits, now."

"Yes, sir. Guess I sort of dozed off," I lied. "It will seem nice to be home. The bed in my dorm has a lumpy mattress, so I'm really looking forward to sacking out in my own bed for a change."

"Of course, of course," he agreed. We were on the straight section of highway leading into town, and the sedan gathered speed. "My wife and I are on our way home from a two weeks vacation at the lake. Sort of a second honeymoon you might call it, I guess," he told me. "At least, that's what it was supposed to be."

I yawned, trying to think of something to say. Ahead, I could see the lights, and I was glad we were nearly there.

"Did you do any fishing?" I asked.

"Fishing? No. You see, my wife doesn't like to be left alone. We had a lovely cottage, right on the lakeshore, but I didn't even go out in a boat."

"Being alone isn't much fun," I said, carefully. "My Mom doesn't

care for fishing trips, either. I guess most ladies aren't much interested in that kind of thing, are they, Mrs. Haskell?"

She didn't give the slightest sign that she'd even heard. Her husband apologized, saying, "We had an argument last night. Just a family argument, you know. The difference this time was that I won. Ruby hasn't ever lost out before, and she hasn't said a word all day." He laughed. It started as an easy, good-natured chuckle. Then the laughter took on a shrill, hysterical pitch and I was scared.

"If you don't mind, I'll get out on the next corner," I said, loudly. He was making too much noise. Every time he'd twist to look at Mrs. Haskell, he laughed all the harder.

"Please! Let me out here!" I shouted. We were only two or three blocks from Main Street. The sedan wasn't going fast, and I reached for the door handle. I was prepared to jump, if I had to.

Then, as abruptly as it started, his laughter stopped. Silence filled the car. Utter and complete silence, except for the hoarse, rapid sounds of my breathing. We were in front of a large, well-lighted brick building. He parked, switching off the ignition, and pushing in the head-

lights button. He opened his door.

"I have to stop here," he said, quietly. His thin face was calm and serious and his mild blue eyes were bright behind his glasses. "I may be inside for quite some time, so I'll say goodbye, young man."

I was already on the sidewalk. The building was the local police station, and although my impulse was to run, to get away from there just as fast as I could, I had to look.

I had to open the front door on the side where Mrs. Haskell sat. She was attractive, although her jaw line was a trifle too sharp, and her long, straight nose had a pinched, haughty cast. She continued to stare straight ahead, thin lips parted, as if ready to snarl forth a protest.

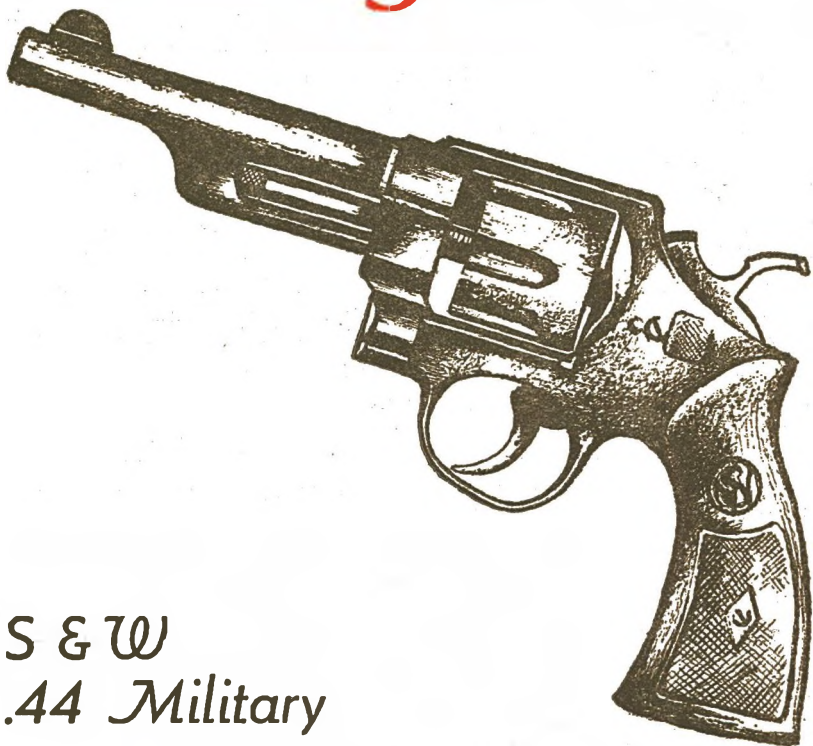
She had been leaning against the door. Now, as I opened it, her plump, bulky body toppled toward me, moving in what seemed like slow motion. The scream that split the peaceful tranquility of our town wasn't hers.

I screamed again, staring down in terror at the stiff, lifeless corpse I'd instinctively grabbed to save from falling. Mr. Henry Haskell had won the argument by use of a bread knife. It was buried to the hilt in his wife's blood-smear'd bosom.



MANHUNT'S

Gun Rack



S & W .44 Military

The SMITH & WESSON .44 MILITARY is particularly popular with the police and border patrol of the Southwest who traditionally prefer a powerful, heavy calibre, long-range weapon. Its .44 S&W Special cartridge makes it the equal of the .45 in muzzle energy and shock power, but gives it far greater accuracy and ranging power. Despite its rugged weight (39½ ounces) the .44 Military, with its excellent balance, is smooth and comfortable to handle.

THE FALLEN COP

Her name was Leona Brett. She needed police protection. She got it. Now two cops are dead, and a third lost his life another way.

BY
ROBERT ANTHONY

HER NAME was Leona Brett. To him she was the most exciting woman he had ever seen.

Ralph Adams wasn't certain what it was about her. There were many things. She was beautiful, not in the brittle classic form, but in the genuine full featured manner that seems uncontrived. Her face was an oval of flawless healthy texture, framed by short raven curls; eyes electric blue, mouth full and sensual. Walking behind her he was aware of the fluid grace of movement. Not gawky or self-conscious her walk. Sheer artistry. She wore wool suits because it was winter, expensive suits, and she wore

them well. When she was seated her skirt rode slightly above her sculptured knees, displaying long flashing legs. Slim waisted, firm breasted, she gave the impression of ripeness, of a golden harvest waiting to be gathered. Yet she was not exclusively of the earth. There was too much aristocracy in her bearing to make the impression of voluptuous peasant completely valid.

Ralph Adams knew all that was available concerning Leona Brett. He knew that she was thirty-two, that once she had been an exotic dancer, that she now owned the intimate night club called simply The Place. The method by which she parlayed her talents to achieve ownership was unspecified but one look at her and a not overactive imagination adequately sketched in the background. Certainly she was not what is commonly referred to as a good girl. The police dossier he read told him that. Association with underworld characters, highest echelon of course, relationship with them, depth of intimacy unknown, divorced her from any pretention to the good girl category.

And Leona Brett knew things and the things she knew were the things the District Attorney wanted to know. The crackdown was underway, the purgation of the established crime controllers in the hope that the upcoming set would have difficulty in reorganization, giving the city a much needed breathing

space before the next crusade be launched in the never ending battle. Another thing about Leona Brett, she was smart in the savvy sense of the word. Questioned, she recognized the inevitability of the wave called law and order sweeping forward, and she let it carry her along. As State's witness, a witness in need of protection. And a part of that protection was the assignment of Detective Ralph Adams.

Because of the nature of the duty and the shortage of men two teams of two men each were detailed to guard the State's witness. Ralph Adams and a detective named Fred Dorsset worked the twelve hour shift beginning at midnight and ending at noon. Dorsset was a large, lumbering, phlegmatic bear of a man. Normally morose and silent, Dorsset occasionally rallied himself to make an observation regarding either sports or sex. Beyond these topics he seemed largely unacquainted. His manner aroused a natural animosity in Adams. He loathed working with him. He considered Dorsset a bastard of the truest bluest stripe.

Leona Brett lived in a suite on the twelfth floor of the Town Plaza Apartments. The first night when they picked her up at The Place, escorting her home, settling down in the plush living room for the long night vigil, Ralph Adams found himself vastly impressed by his surroundings. The suite was beautifully furnished, modern, ex-

pensive, and in the best taste. Slouching against the soft yielding down of the couch, letting his fingers explore the fabric, he was suffused with a sense of well being. Contrasting in his mind this with his own heavily mortgaged Cape Cod he felt the stirrings of unrealized yearnings, the desire for the good things. Touching the fabric, inhaling the atmosphere of the room through his pores, he derived a tactile pleasure which sent a shiver of pleasant anticipation along the base of his neck. Dorsset was thumbing through copies of women's magazines he had taken from the bottom shelf of the mahogany bookcase, mumbling to himself in disgust.

"Boy, this is some pad," Dorsset observed dourly but Ralph Adams ignored the comment.

Leona Brett came out from the bedroom. She was dressed in a pale blue negligee the color of her eyes worn over her chiffon nightgown. A smile pulled at the corners of her lips. "I hope you gentlemen are comfortable."

"Yes, thank you, Miss Brett," Ralph Adams said quickly, noticing the way Dorsset was eyeing her, not liking it.

"I feel as though I'm imposing upon you and the other two detectives," she said. "Really I don't believe that I'm in any danger, do you?"

"Well you never know. It pays to be safe," Ralph Adams said, think-

ing how he sounded like a small boy, feeling very much that way.

"I'm tired so both of you make yourselves at home. Oh yes, we'll probably be together for quite awhile so call me Leona please." She smiled at them, said goodnight, and returned to the bedroom.

"Boy, did you dig that?" Dorsset was chuckling. "'Make yourselves at home.' I tell you buddyroo, I wouldn't for one minute mind making myself at home and going in that li'l old room with her right now."

"Find yourself a racing form and get lost in it," Ralph Adams snapped.

It wasn't sex. He was certain of that. At least he told himself that he was certain. But when he returned home the following afternoon and saw Marge, his wife, in her housedress, using the vacuum cleaner, her taffy hair slightly damp at the ends from perspiration, shrilling at the children to keep quiet now because daddy was going to sleep, he experienced a wave of disappointment. He realized that being disappointed with Marge, with the crowded simplicity of their house, was grossly unfair. He was equating two completely dissimilar economic levels. If not beautiful, his wife was certainly pretty, especially when she was dressed. But how well and how often could she dress with a house and family to keep on a detective's salary.

"You know I'm not quite sure I'll like your new assignment," she said as she followed him upstairs, sitting on the bed while he began undressing. "You're going to be away so much. But tell me, how was the glamour girl?"

"Oh so, so," he shrugged, hoping to discourage further questions.

"You're guarding someone who looks like she just came off a Hollywood set and that's all you can say," she laughed.

"She's very attractive," he said lamely.

"How about the apartment? I'll bet it's really ultra, huh?"

"Very nice. Beautiful furniture."

"Honey, you sound like that great silent hulk you work with. Come on now, tell me about it."

"Look, Marge, I'm bushed," he tried to filter the irritation from his voice. "I'd like to turn in now."

"Okay, I'm sorry." She smiled but behind the smile he saw her disappointment. "Say, you're not falling for her are you?"

He knew she was teasing, but was aware of an undercurrent in the question. Or was that in his mind? "With a sexy partner like you how could I?" This satisfied her and she kissed him, then left the room.

He lay in bed, arm across his eyes, shutting out the light. It isn't sex, he told himself again. It's a magic spell she weaves, just walking into a room. He realized how unreasonably romantic he sounded, even

to himself. But why the comparison? Why should he look at Marge and feel the vague resentment that she did not possess the beauty of Leona Brett? He loved his wife. Damn right. And he had seen beautiful women before. But not as close as Leona, not with the same intimacy as when a woman came into a room wearing a negligee. And no, he was not sanctifying her. He harbored no illusions about how advantageously she had utilized her physical attributes to arrive in the Town Plaza. But she wasn't like used merchandise. There's too much fineness, the richness of her and her surroundings. That's what it is he decided. You're a little boy being seduced by the glamour of the situation. Before he fell asleep he found himself almost wishing that he had never been given the assignment. But that was stupid. What the hell was the matter with him? It was the best duty he ever had.

Driving through the thinning late evening traffic the following night Ralph Adams repeatedly from habit checked the rear view mirror. Noticing the headlights a discreet half block behind he turned right at the intersection. The headlights followed. Nudging Dorsset he said, "Looks like we might have company."

As Dorsset swung heavily about to peer through the rear window, Leona Brett laughed nervously from the back seat.

"Just like the movies."

She had been singing. "Once in awhile, won't you please give one little thought to me." She didn't sing well. Her voice was husky and she almost talked the song but he liked it. It made him feel warm and cozy with her singing.

"Don't be alarmed, Leona," he found the use of her name familiar and faintly embarrassing. "There's nothing to worry about."

"With you here I won't be alarmed," she said.

Dorsset snorted. "Angle across the street, stop, and let's roust whoever's in that car back there."

Loosening the snub nose .38 in his shoulder holster Ralph Adams found that his hands trembled slightly. When he initially noticed the lights they hadn't upset him, merely placed him on alert. Now, with Leona's expressed confidence and Dorsset's suggestion, he was becoming nervous.

"We're supposed to protect Miss Brett," he said to Dorsset. "We'll leave the heroics to someone else."

They were using an unmarked police car and he reached over switching on the two way radio, picking up the microphone. Calling headquarters he gave their position, explained the situation, requesting that a prowler intercept the one trailing them and investigate. A mile further when the red police car slid out of a sidestreet and halted the automobile, he breathed easier. By the time they reached the

apartment they had received notification that the occupants of the suspect car were interviewed and released.

"You gettin' jumpy or somethin'?" Dorset asked with heavy sarcasm.

"Just careful," he replied shortly.

"I certainly appreciate Ralph's caution," Leona Brett said. "After all it's my life and over caution is preferable to too little."

For a week there were no alarms. With someone else it might have been a deadly assignment. With Leona Brett it was exhilarating. Ralph Adams felt as though he were in a runaway car without brakes. Crossing the crest of the hill it had begun, innocuously enough, its downhill journey. But the pace accelerated inevitably, the pumping of the brake futile, and what he feared most of all was the time when he would not bother to even attempt the braking action. It was a good week for Ralph Adams, a week of soaring in the clouds of romanticism. Leona liked him. He did not delude himself. She liked him as a person, nothing more. And yet there was always the hope, or was it a hope? If not, what then? A fear? Of whom, Leona; himself, his duty to Marge and the children? He was a man dissected, severed neatly into two equal parts. But a man cannot live in two halves he told himself. And even that became unimportant.

Considering the mental torture, the proddings of guilt, Ralph Adams accepted his role happily, even eagerly. He became aware of the nuances of Leona Brett, the mannerisms giving dimension to the person. The flash of white teeth beneath her ready smile made him think of Houseman's cherry hung with snow. The tilt of her head in an attitude of listening when he spoke. The laugh that seemed to bubble merrily from her throat. The heady musky scent of her. And dutifully he applied the brake, telling himself he was foolish, but the downhill careen increased each day.

Dorset reported in ill. They gave him a kid whom he knew only vaguely, a stringbean youngster named Curry. Ralph Adams was delighted to be free of Dorset's relentless gaze, the sour knowing smile. Probably jealous, he concluded. Leona paid him little attention. They reached the apartment and Leona asked if they wanted coffee. Ralph said he'd make it while she changed. He knew that she liked to shed street clothes as soon as she was home. Standing in the gleaming whiteness of the kitchen he automatically checked the door of the service entrance, then began spooning the coffee into the electric percolator. He was playing a game in his mind. He was the husband and in a few moments his wife, Leona, would walk through the door wearing her negligee and he would take her in his arms. Curry was in the

living room. The game in his mind worried him, but he let it run on, unable or unwilling to stop it. And then Leona was there, wearing black satin toreador trousers and loose fitting white blouse. A red ribbon gleamed in the raven hair. Ralph Adams thought how strange it was that she looked as desirable dressed this way as when wearing a negligee.

"Hi," she smiled. "Here, let me do that." She measured water into the percolator.

"You know I feel as though each time you enter a room you find me staring there open mouthed," he laughed, covering his embarrassment. The way he must often look to her, stupid, childish, worried him.

"A man of the world like you?" she said.

"I know you're teasing me, Leona. I'm much too prosaic to be called that. But really, you're so attractive you make me self conscious. You intimidate me."

She laughed the bubbly sound. "It's nice of you to say so even if it's only flattery."

"Honestly, Leona, it isn't that. I'm not clever with words and I realize I could never make flattery sound sincere. So I don't. I . . ."

He heard the knock at the living room door, Curry calling "I'll get it." For a moment he was frozen, then shouted "No" and began running, tugging the .38 free from the shoulder holster as he moved. He

reached the archway between living room and dining room in time to see Curry sent sprawling by the door bursting inward against him. There were three of them, wearing topcoats and felt hats, nondescript, the people passed in the street. Using the arch as a shield he fell to one knee, firing. He hit the first man, seeing from the corner of his eye Curry frantically clawing at his revolver. The second man snapped a shot at him which splintered the frame of the arch beside his head, forcing him to duck for cover. He was out in time to see Curry and the second man blazing away at each other while the third streaked across the room directly towards him, firing erratically with the sub machine gun. He thought how this was like the Capone days and how these things weren't done any more as he measured the onrushing man, firing three times, seeing him swerve, crash into a drum table, fall amid gushing blood, splintering furniture and shattering lamp. Peering into the living room Ralph Adams saw the second man down. A glance at young Curry was all he needed. Hurrying to the boy he never really knew, looking down into the face a surprised grey and twisted with pain, he felt for the pulse, finding a single feeble beat, then nothing. Grimly he arose, crossed to the telephone, and called headquarters. Thirty seconds, less perhaps, and four men were dead.

And then Leona came in, timid-

ly, like a frightened doe, pale, lips working nervously. She surveyed the carnage, then came to him, burying her head against his shoulder, her body trembling against him. Slowly, instinctively, he slipped his arms about her, patting her back, stroking her hair. And gradually he forgot the death surrounding them, conscious only of the musky scent and the lushness of the body within his arms. Each place they touched he seemed to be on fire. And he felt himself slipping irrevocably, captured by the fullness, the flesh and blood promise within his reach. Stepping away from her, lifting her chin, he bent forward, kissing the slightly parted lips, feeling a great liquid thing swell inside him, bursting in his head. She moved away, smiling wistfully. He lit a cigarette with hands trembling so badly he could barely hold the match.

The following night Dorsset was back.

"Some show you had, huh?"

"Yeah, you bet." *Adams you bastard, how can you feel this way and say you still love Marge? It isn't fair. And how many times since last night have you told yourself that? Not fair, not fair, not fair. Over and over.*

"I'll bet you're quite the little hero to the broad."

"Don't think too hard, Dorsset. You'll strain yourself." *And her kiss. Was there ever in your life a*

moment to equal that? I mean, what do you do? How can you fight a thing like this? So much to gain, so much to lose. You pays your money and you takes your choice.

"One thing, buddyroo, I'll be real careful. With a guy like you backing me up I could get killed."

"I was in the kitchen. I called to Curry not to open the door. It was his own damn fault." *In the kitchen, with Leona. And a man dies. And do you really care, Ralph Adams? Perhaps you don't like yourself for what you've become but do you really give a good damn about poor dead Curry?*

"Okay, so play footsie. I don't blame you, Adams. I would too if that broad gave me the chance."

"Shut the hell up will you Dorsset?" *And who are you shutting up? Dorsset? Or is it yourself whom you would silence? The voices, the accusing voices. Will they never stop?*

They were sitting in the kitchen, drinking coffee. Dorsset was in the living room. Leona had taken off her makeup and her eyes appeared tired, shadowed blue. Yet she was completely lovely without cosmetic aids, so simply and naturally lovely at this moment. And in a way pathetic. Like a little girl. Defenseless.

"At least he gives us privacy now," Ralph Adams grinned and gestured with a thumb towards the living room.

"What did you do, make some sort of a deal with him?" she asked.

"Nope. Good old Dorset believes in the finer things of life."

She laughed. Ralph reached over and covered her hand with his own. The hand was small and fitted neatly beneath his.

"Leona, dear Leona. You're completely incredible, beyond belief."

"You know I do suspect that detectives have a certain allotment of poetry beneath their gruff exteriors."

"If it exists it wouldn't be difficult for you to bring it out."

"You know Ralph, I'm not all that you might think I am." She seemed pensive, uncertain of herself. "There have been, well, there have been men in my life."

"Leona, don't." How sweet, he thought. How truly good and honest of her. Recognizing the childishness of his thoughts, he closed his mind to it. Leaning across the table he brushed her lips with his own, nothing soulful, passionate, yet in its very simplicity and the satisfaction resulting he realized a danger deeper than in the spontaneous violence of their first kiss. "Tell me, Leona, is it me or do you feel this thing too? Sometimes I tell myself how crazy I am to believe, even to hope that you could ever . . ."

The fingers which she placed against his lips were cool and soft. He gripped them, kissing them, seeing the fine taper of the nails, the

pale titian gleam of polish, the neatly manicured cuticles. No, it wasn't sex. At least not anymore. It was love. Oh God yes, it was love.

The children wanted him to romp with them and he refused. He refused curtly and when they insisted, with an obvious show of temper. Then he looked down into their small crestfallen faces and he was sorry. He could not understand what made him act as he did. The very sight of his home, his family, annoyed him. He would pull into the driveway whistling and all of a sudden he would change. He thought that perhaps it was his unconscious wish to disassociate himself entirely with these twelve hours of his life. This was an interval between those twelve hours of duty, nothing more. A pause along the journey until movement began again. It was a hell of a way to feel and he hated himself for it. But he decided not to fight the feeling. Why tear himself up more than necessary? The hell with Marge. The hell with the kids. You're a bastard so be a bastard. Simple, economical. Convenient.

"You've been so quiet lately, Ralph," Marge said.

"Oh I don't think I've been any more quiet than usual," he said, using an expansive tone, the kind of tone by which he meant I don't want to hear any more so leave it alone.

"If there's anything bothering

you I wish you'd let me know."

He looked at her, at the unmade-up face, the taffy hair, at the prettiness of his wife, the mother of his children. He experienced a great surge of pity for her, remembering the kindness, her affection, her love, her devotion. You're an animal, he told himself. Alright, a bastard and an animal. And so what? He thought of Leona, her beauty, his own little boy romantic concepts. But who moved him, who made his head spin giddily? Not Marge, certainly not Marge. Before, perhaps, but not recently. And then he began wondering how these things happened, these impacts and soarings. Do they simply happen or do you want them and by the wanting make them happen? He didn't know. And that business about Marge not moving him wasn't completely true. But if a more brilliant star shines close beside one less brilliant, doesn't the lesser pale into insignificance?

"Honestly Ralph, sometimes I think you're in another world. I said if there's anything bothering you please let me know."

"Bothering me? What should be bothering me?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

She looked so unsure, so forlorn sitting there. Impulsively he got up, crossed to her chair. And when he got there he didn't know quite what to do. Good God, I've become a stranger with my own wife, he thought. So he stood beside the

chair, stroking her hair self consciously, thinking how perfectly inane and absurd he was standing there like this. As though he were petting a dog. Marge, Marge, I'm sorry. Forgive me, forgive me. Because I'm helpless. She's like a magnet. There's no other way. For me there's no other way.

They always left the club by the back entrance, walked up the area-way between The Place and the adjoining building to the street and the car. Leona Brett, Ralph Adams, Dorsset. It saved time in getting out. Leona was always being stopped by a patron who wanted to say hello. And tonight Dorsset had the complainers. His feet, his poor fat aching feet. All the way to the club Adams listened to it. And when they parked his partner literally wailed at the prospect of walking into the building. "So wait here," Adams told him angrily and went inside. It was after two when Leona was ready to leave. As they emerged from the club he noticed that instead of the three lights normally burning along the passage there was only the single bulb over the doorway where they stood.

"Now what do you think of that?" Ralph Adams said more to himself than Leona.

"Those kids. Throwing stones at the bulbs again. Last year we put wire shields over them and they shot the bulbs with BBs. It took so long to remove the shields and

change the lights we gave up on them."

"I don't know," he said slowly.

"What do you mean you don't know? What is it you don't know?"

Leona was in a mood tonight, nervous, upset, and he didn't want to trouble her further. Besides, going back and using the front entrance would possibly indicate cowardice to her. So although it was against his better judgment he took her arm and started into the darkness.

Halfway down the passage he saw the dim, crouched figures. Thrusting Leona Brett behind him he reached for his revolver. The shadows moved swiftly down upon him and he could barely distinguish the glint of the knives they held. Because of his topcoat and the speed of their approach he realized that he would never free the revolver in time. Come on Dorsset, you slob. Get in here, quick. And then it was too late to think of Dorsset any longer. Because of the narrowness of the passage they came singly. He measured the first in the dimness of the light, feinted a step backward, lashing out with his foot. It was a good maneuver, catching the man in the groin or stomach, causing a cry of pain as he crumbled. The second moved quickly over his fallen comrade, slashing while Ralph Adams backpeddled, feeling the tug of knife at topcoat, the whispering rend of fabric. He wished he could get free of the coat,

swing it at his assailant to sway his balance. The man slashed again, knicking the hand which Ralph Adams tried to clamp upon the darting wrist. He came on, pressing in, knife held belt high. Both times he had moved slightly forward, slashing from right to left. It was a gamble that he would repeat the maneuver a third time, but worth the risk. And necessary. Leona Brett was still behind him, for some reason not running for the door. And then he remembered, the door locked automatically upon closing. It could be opened only from the inside. Pounding on it would summon someone but there was hardly time for pounding. Dorsset you bastard, come on.

Ralph Adams heard the rasping sound of his breathing. Strange, he thought. Leona hadn't screamed. Actually the only sound had been the cry of pain from the man he kicked, now rising in the background unsteadily to his feet. His attacker bore in, leaping suddenly, repeating the right to left arc with the knife. Ralph Adams faked his try at the wrist again, pushed himself forward and to his left bringing him against the wall, over the knife, his lower body momentarily exposed, leaning all his strength into the blow aimed at the man's chin. He was high, off the cheekbone, but the impact spun the smaller man against the wall. Ralph Adams followed through, kicking wildly at the knife hand, then smashing hard

for the stomach, once, twice, the man doubling, spinning, beginning to run. The two of them were moving away and he began unsteadily after them. Then he thought of Leona and stopped.

Her face in the dim light near the doorway was pale, lips parted, eyes wide with excitement.

"It's alright," he panted, standing before her, placing his unwounded hand upon her shoulder.

"You're hurt." She lifted his hand, staring wide eyed at the knife wound. Then she did something which thrilled him and embarrassed him, something symbolically erotic and spontaneously innocent at the same time. Raising the bleeding hand to her lips she kissed it. Looking up at him he saw her lips and chin crimsoned with his blood, the teeth small and white amid so much red. At that moment she possessed him fully.

"Hey," they heard Dorsset calling from the end of the passageway. "I been asleep. Aren't you two ever coming out?" Ralph Adams cursed. Then he began to laugh, genuine mirth touched with hysteria. Holding Leona's arm he walked toward Dorsset.

Trial date, one week away. Then three days. Then two. Ralph Adams lived in an agony of indecision. After the trial was that to be the end of it? Of what? Nothing had happened, hand holdings, a few kisses. But he had fought it and he

had lost. He had to have Leona Brett. The thought of an illicit love occurred to him but he did not know how to approach it. Besides, he was seeking permanence. Did the fact that the thought had been born in the first place indicate a subconscious doubt that this thing with Leona would not be permanent? There he was, analyzing again, being so damned introspective without enough real knowledge of himself. The thought of Marge tortured him, her presence a continual indictment of his betrayal. And which was the stronger, his sense of loyalty or his desire? And he would look at Leona Brett and become weak inside. And he had his answer. It couldn't end. Regardless of the consequences, it couldn't end.

"Go down to the lobby please, Ralph, and get me a pack of English Ovals," Leona Brett asked him.

"Here, have one of mine."

"You know I only smoke Ovals. Now be a dear."

"I don't know why we can't send Dorsset and then we'd be alone," he spoke peevishly. The strain was wearing him down.

"Dorsset and his aching feet," she laughed and he found himself laughing along with her.

When he returned he decided to use the service entrance to which he carried a key rather than ring the buzzer and go through the door shoutings with Dorsset before gaining admittance. Leaving the kitch-

en he crossed the dining room, then the living room, finding both strangely vacant. The bedroom door was open and he heard voices. He had never been inside Leona's bedroom, seeing it only from the door, the white rug, the lower segment of the huge oval bed with the brass footpiece, the dressing table. When he looked now he could see Dorsset and Leona. She was dressed for the street, unusual for this time of night. He noticed the cocoa hat matching her brown tweed suit and felt a sudden apprehension overriding his resentment of Dorsset being inside her bedroom. Privileged territory. Sacred territory.

"So you're planning a trip," Dorsset was saying heavily.

"Yes, do you mind?" Leona answered. She was standing facing the bed, her back to Dorsset and for the first time Ralph Adams saw the suitcases on the bed. He leaned against the wall for support, feeling weak and sick.

"What about Adams the boy wonder?" Dorsset chuckled heavily. "You been conning him pretty hard."

"Even to the I've known other men Ralph dear bit," she said quietly. "You're more discerning than I gave you credit for, Dorsset. I think he'll go along if I ask him. But perhaps I don't need him. Do I need him Dorsset?"

"I been wondering when you'd decide to run," he said.

"I decided a long time ago. When

I first talked to the D.A. I knew in the end I could never take the stand. This has given me the time, more than enough to make the necessary arrangements. You see, I could repeat what I told him, much more, but those men I accused would ruin me. I'm involved you know. Too deeply to escape prison. And I'm not going to prison. But you haven't answered my question. Do I need Ralph?"

Dorsset laughed, an explosive, nasty sound. "And what would you do for me? Hold my hand? Let me put my arm around you?"

The raven curls shook a slow negative. "It wouldn't be enough for you. For you it would have to be money."

"Only you don't have that much," he said flatly. "Twice I stayed out of the way to let them have a crack at you. Somebody paid me to do that. Now they're paying me a lot more to do the job myself."

Ralph Adams drew his revolver. A shot through the doorway. At Dorsset. Now. Now. And then he would have . . . have what? Leona Brett? It was a laugh, a positive howl, if only he could muster the strength to laugh. He saw Leona turn, a small black automatic in her hand. Twenty-five calibre, belly gun, his mind functioned automatically.

"Well now," Dorsset said. He didn't seem particularly concerned. "So that's the way it's going to be. Listen, baby, it won't work. You

kill me and you'll never get out of here."

"I'll tear my clothes, say you tried to attack me."

Dorsett laughed. "Close but no cigar. Ralphie boy is going to be back soon and I got my job to do. Common now."

He took a step towards her, across the white rug.

"Don't Dorset. I'll shoot." Leona Brett said.

From the coldness in her voice Ralph Adams realized that she was capable of shooting. He raised his revolver, saw it waver from Leona to Dorsett, back to Leona again. Then it lowered and he leaned his head against the wall, perspiring heavily, trembling and nauseated.

"Now give me the gun, baby," he heard Dorsett say, heard him chuckle his obscene chuckle, just before the two explosions shattered the room. Lifting his head he saw the bulk on the white carpet, the slowly spreading cerise satin. All he could think was, Dorsett was a bastard.

And now for Leona Brett. Now to arrest her, to perform his duty, to fulfill the oath he had taken when joining the force. And somehow in his mind there jumbled a mass of images, of Dorsett smiling emptily, his own hand upraised in the oath taking, Marge clutching the children, and Leona Brett kissing his bloodied hand. Dorsett was a crooked cop. He owed him nothing. Marge was his wife. There were the children. He owed them

nothing. He had vowed to uphold law and order. He owed himself nothing. Then whom did he owe, did he owe, did he owe?

Leona Brett came from the bedroom, carrying the suitcase. At the sight of him she paused, laying down the case, reaching inside her handbag. Her gun. She'll kill me if she has to, Ralph Adams thought. Then he remembered the .38 in his own hand. Slowly he returned it to his holster.

"Ralph, I wasn't leaving without you. I want you to come with me." Leona's face was white, her make-up stark and grotesque against the whiteness. "He tried to kill me. Dorsett tried to kill me. You hear?"

"Go away, Leona," he said, thinking he should arrest her, not giving a damn about that anymore. He thought her makeup against the white face looked like Dorsett's stain on the carpet.

"Come with me, Ralph," she said it a little desperately, the composure for once ruptured, the mask stripped away.

"Get out, Leona," he spoke softly, turning his back, moving towards the kitchen. "Damn you, get out."

He sensed her going, turned his head slightly, caught the rhythmic swing of rounded hips, the flash of nyloned legs. And the door closed upon her, leaving only the musky scent, the memory, and the body upon the white bedroom rug.

Four days later they caught her.

Ralph Adams testified at the trial, stating that he had gone for cigarettes, returned to find Dorsset dead, Leona gone. The defense contended that Leona acted in self defense. He was a good attorney with a beautiful client to beguile the largely male jury. Leona Brett was acquitted. In the trial in which she appeared as State's witness she was not so fortunate. Due to testimony she was indicted on a conspiracy charge, found guilty, and sentenced to five years in prison.

When Ralph Adams shaved he never met his eyes in the bathroom mirror. The thing with Leona Brett was ended, but because of her his life with Marge would never be the same again. The guilt stood in his way. They would go on, occasionally he would achieve near happiness, but the memory of his betrayal of her was always there to haunt him. And he would never quite

recover from his own betrayal by Leona. Not that he didn't deserve it. But the fact that he had gone so far, committed himself so deeply, made the wound a grievous one. As a police officer he was in the clear. Not even a demotion. No smear on his character. Only the knowledge, the dream-filling, heart-pounding, sweat-drenched, awakening knowledge that he had permitted a murderer to escape, later perjured himself to protect her, clung to him like an evil smell.

Dorsset, Leona Brett, Ralph Adams. Three of a kind, he thought. And in the end he wondered which of the three was the better off. He supposed that he was although he was not quite certain. At least he had Marge and the hope that someday in the far off future he could begin living with himself, again face those accusing eyes watching him from the mirror. At least he had that.



They say there's a bit of the primitive beast in every man, no matter how meek. But timid Stanley Bingham let it go to his head.

BY C. B. GILFORD



CRY WOLF!

Two terrifying developments had entered the heretofore placid life of Stanley Bingham. The first was the mysterious thing, the fearful way his hair was growing. The second was that after nearly forty years of never harming a fly, Stanley was contemplating murder. Possibly a double murder.

Of course the two matters were

connected. Though like the chicken and the egg, Stanley didn't know which preceded and caused the other. Whether he'd decided to commit murder because his hair was growing, and especially because of the way it was growing. Or whether the way his hair was growing was because he'd begun to think of murder.

Or to put it more precisely: which came first, the day he noticed his bald spot was filling in, or the day he realized that his hatred of his brother-in-law was implacable, revengeful, and bloodthirsty?

Even though he couldn't place them now chronologically, he could remember both events with perfect clarity. It was the hair that had astounded him most, of course. Because he'd been so concerned for so long about the loss of his hair. And then—somehow—

"For pity's sake!" Alvina had exclaimed one morning. "That bald spot of yours is as big as a saucer!" It had been one of those things that could happen slowly for a long time, and then quite suddenly burst upon the consciousness.

He hadn't noticed it himself. But he'd maneuvered with a hand mirror till he could see the back of his head, and then the ravages of time had become clear to him too. He had worried about it for a few days, wondering whether Alvina was going to start looking for a lover. But then he'd realized that Alvina had deteriorated a bit too, and his fears were calmed. Down at the office he took to wearing an old-fashioned green eyeshade as he scribbled in his ledgers. His co-workers thought him odd, but at least the boss wasn't constantly reminded that Stanley Bingham was getting old.

And then the incredible happened! With the hand mirror he'd

been subjecting the spot to periodic examinations. And one day he noticed it. The spot was smaller!

He said nothing about it to Alvina, and since she wasn't infatuated with the back of his head, she didn't seem aware of the miracle. And because miracles are such fragile events Stanley was afraid to call the matter to her attention lest the whole thing should prove a mirage.

But it was no mirage. The bald spot grew almost daily smaller. The circle of surrounding hair contracted, like the lips of a wound healing and closing. Stanley was overjoyed. His youth returning? His virility? Perhaps the cause of it all was something inside him, some strange spring of energy suddenly tapped.

On the remarkable day that the gap closed completely, he really expected Alvina to notice. Her silence irked him. But then by that time other things were irking him too. And those same things were probably what had distracted Alvina from his hair. Those things all added up to one word—Dexter.

In the beginning Stanley hadn't minded about Dexter moving in with them. "He lost his job," Alvina had explained. "And you know Dexter. Like every other bachelor, he never saves a penny. So he's dead broke. He can't pay his rent. He can't eat. We've either got to loan him the money, Stanley, or let him live here."

It had been cheaper, of course, to take him in. There was the small

spare bedroom that was empty anyway. And though Dexter had an enormous appetite, it was more economical to feed him in their own kitchen than to finance him in restaurants.

"It's just temporary," Alvina had said.

Temporary. That had been the key to the whole situation. A person can endure almost anything if there's a promise of speedy deliverance. But it hadn't been temporary. Dexter had stayed on and on. He was still here.

Stanley had lost track of the elapsed time by now. That was why he couldn't place which event had happened first. The arrival of Dexter or the start of hair growing. Perhaps they'd been simultaneous. Stanley's life was confused.

But the hatred surely must not have begun until it had become obvious that Dexter wasn't intending to look for a job, that he didn't want a job, and that he was quite content to sponge off Stanley till one of them was in his grave. That hatred didn't really just begin either. Rather it exploded. It was an emotion that would not be satisfied merely by Dexter's packing up and leaving the house, nor even by Dexter's doing that plus settling up for his board and room. It would be satisfied only by Dexter's being *punished* somehow. Punished for gluttony, for sloth, for bad manners, for insulting and criticizing his host, for destroying his privacy,

and thereby his home . . . punished, in the last analysis, for being Dexter. What Stanley actually wanted was revenge—full, complete, final.

Stanley Bingham had never felt like that before. He was the mildest, gentlest of men. And to have such a volcano of fury erupt within him! "Well, Dexter," he said at the dinner table, "did you see Mr. Fiedler today?"

Stanley had gone to considerable pains to set up the appointment with Mr. Fiedler. The job that Mr. Fiedler had open was just the kind that even Dexter could do. The pay wasn't too bad, the demands small. Mr. Fiedler liked Stanley. He would have liked to do him a favor by hiring his brother-in-law.

"I asked you a question, Dexter. Did you see Mr. Fiedler?"

Perhaps the reason Dexter hadn't replied immediately was that his capacious maw was stuffed with roast beef, potatoes and gravy, peas, corn and salad. Dexter didn't mind talking with his mouth full if there was just a little room to let the words go through. After a swallow or two, there was. "Nope," he said.

Stanley felt a warmth rising inside him. "Why not?" he demanded, in a voice so strong he didn't recognize it as his own.

"I was busy today," Dexter said. "Busy! Doing what?"

Dexter glanced up from his plate, his tiny eyes wide with wonder but still tiny. His white, flabby skin

was glistening with greasy sweat. Beneath heavy folds of cheek, his powerful jaws masticated the food, while a thin stream of gravy trickled down his chin, and dripped thence to his tie. One of Stanley's ties, in fact. Speechless, Dexter sucked on his de-nuded corn cob.

It was Alvina who sailed into the breach. Alvina, not pleading but belligerent. "You know what Dexter does," she snapped.

"I'm afraid not. What does he do?"

"He thinks."

"Thinks!"

"Creates."

"Creates!"

"He's an inventor."

"Oh yes, I believe you did mention before that Dexter was an inventor. "Well then today, while he should have been seeing Mr. Fiedler and trying to get himself an honest job, what was he inventing?"

Alvina opened her thin-lipped mouth to say something enlightening, but then closed it decisively. Seconds passed before she answered. "Since you're so unreasonable, it's none of your business," she said finally.

He had seldom ever raised his voice to Alvina in all the long years of their companionship. But he literally shrieked at her now. "Look, if I'm supporting this overweight genius, the least I deserve is to be told what he wastes his time inventing!"

CRY WOLF!

In later scenes, of course, he wasn't as obvious and as violent. He learned afterwards to conceal his feelings better. There was nothing secret or subtle about the way things were any more, however. The hatred between him and Dexter, though muted, was declared and real. And Alvina had made her choice. Brother and sister, they stood united against the alien husband. And Stanley Bingham's hatred was large enough to include them both.

It was raging inside him now. Unable to endure the sight of Dexter any longer, he staggered from the table to his own bedroom, where he clutched at the top of the bureau to keep from being swept away by the tide of his emotions.

Till a new consciousness awoke in him. His hands! The backs of his hands . . . was it imagination . . . illusion . . . or reality? Was there actually more hair on the backs of his hands?

And the hands . . . were they different somehow? Had they changed in size or shape or quality? Did they seem less like hands and more like . . . something else?

Stanley Bingham lifted his head, stared into the mirror in the half-dark room. A face stared back at him almost as strange to him as his voice a moment ago, as his hands just now. Not the placid, benign face of Stanley Bingham, book-keeper. But an animal face, bestial, wild, snarling, wolfish . . .

Wolfish!

The reaction was instantaneous. His white-hot fury was cooled by the icy torrent of fear that ran suddenly in his veins. The face in the mirror relaxed, changed shape and quality, became gentled, domesticated. The features of Stanley Bingham emerged again from the contorted folds of flesh. Almost . . . not quite . . .

Trembling, with terror rather than rage, Stanley examined the newly evolved image. The old Stanley was still there all right, recognizable. At the same time too, the face was strangely altered. Undeniably. But where? How?

He studied what he saw, contour by contour. He couldn't determine that any single detail was different. Yet the difference was there. Not in the chin, the jaws, the mouth, nor even in the eyes . . . but yes . . . the hair!

The Stanley Bingham of former days had worn his hair, whatever its amount, like any civilized man. A neat part at one side, then brushed neatly away from the part in either direction, held rather firmly in place with a drug store preparation out of a bottle . . . and therefore seeming to grow horizontal. But now the hair appeared to be thicker, shinier, raised . . . vertical. Like fur . . . yes, fur . . . bristling along the spine of an angry animal . . . like a cat, or a dog . . . or a wolf.

A man . . . a werewolf!

Stanley Bingham had never been the superstitious sort. He'd never given the slightest credence to ghosts, zombies, vampires, materializations. He'd never cared for late-evening monster movies on television. He'd always been a sober, sane, solid citizen without complication or imagination. Yet now the foundation of his being crumbled, and atop that edifice, his mind, struggling to retain its reason, tottered on the edge of the abyss.

Of the continued growth of his hair there was no doubt. It was quite visible, even measurable. And the speed of growth was increasing.

Some of this growth occurred, though to a lesser degree, on the backs of his hands and along the fingers. The existent hairs grew longer, new ones sprouted. Their color, always dark, grew blacker, more lustrous. The time was approaching when these areas of skin would be completely covered by a solid matting. On the rest of his body he wasn't sure. His original hairiness made judgment there difficult. But at least the process was going at a slower pace.

Quite the opposite, however, for the top of his head. There the growth seemed to gather momentum with each passing day. At first he could cope with it, attempt to disguise the situation, by applying various goopy preparations to keep the hair plastered down. But as the new growth strengthened, became more bristly, it resisted efforts at

home management. Stanley had more and more frequent recourse to barbers, employing half a dozen in rotating succession, so that no single one could be aware of the phenomenal growth speed. These surgeons hacked away at the stuff on Stanley's head, left bushels of it on their tiled floors. But it kept right on sprouting.

Stanley spent long hours in front of mirrors, at home, at the office, at locations in between. He watched for other signs. They were there, but smaller, more subtle than the hair. The ears, for instance, were almost imperceptibly changing their shape, becoming elongated, tapered. If it hadn't been the hair, he might never even have noticed. The mouth too was assuming new contours, the lips thinning, tightening, ever ready—as Stanley practiced before the mirror—to draw back into a toothsome snarl. Which led to the discovery of a feature Stanley hadn't noted in himself before. He was already endowed with teeth rather pointed and sharp, especially that pair so aptly called "the canines." Whenever Stanley studied his reflection and twisted his mouth into the snarl, those teeth dripped with saliva, and a low, guttural sound like a growl emanated automatically from his throat.

And there came that evening—after a visit to a barber who stayed open late—when Stanley on his walk home passed through an area

devoid of trees and giving a wide vista of the sky, and there in the middle of that sky hung the full moon. Only the tightest self-control kept him from throwing back his head and baying at that cold, ancient light up there.

"And what did Dexter do today?" he asked of Alvina at the dinner table. He was aware that his voice had grown huskier of late.

She still made a pretence of wifely friendship. "I think Dexter was tired today," she answered sweetly. "So he rested. Didn't you rest, Dexter?"

Dexter, mopping his plate with a swab of bread, nodded without glancing up, and mumbled assent through a stuffed mouth.

"And what was Dexter resting from?"

"He's been thinking very hard lately."

"I see."

"Thinking is the hardest work there is. You don't seem to realize that, Stanley. A creative mind expends more energy than a strong back. But you don't know, of course, Stanley. Somehow I don't believe you think very much. You simply feel. Dexter said you're a primitive type."

Dexter glanced up with a bland, innocent expression. He was finished swabbing the juice and gravy now. His gullet worked ponderously swallowing the final morsels. He sat back in his chair, patiently

awaiting the arrival of dessert. Alvina always provided dessert, even though Dexter was often the only one who ate it.

"Cocoanut cream pie tonight, Dexter," she trilled.

He settled further back in his chair and beamed seraphically as Alvina tripped off to the kitchen. His paunch always interfered with his getting too close to the table, so he either had to lean far forward or far back. He usually leaned back to rest between courses.

I want to kill him, Stanley thought. Perhaps afterwards I'll kill Alvina too, but principally I want to kill Dexter. It's only the way I want to kill him that frightens me. I don't want to use a gun or a knife or any kind of poison. I want to sink my teeth into his throat, that's what I want. Oh yes, I can find his jugular vein, even though it's hidden under layers of lardy flesh. I may not like the taste of the flesh, but that won't matter. I'll delight in the taste of his blood. Look at him there. He's watching me. But he's so stuffed with food that he doesn't have sense enough to be afraid. What does he remind one of? A satisfied cow? A gorged hyena? No, he's too fat, too greasy for either of those.

And then the lines of the old nursery tale ran through Stanley's mind. He had to grin.

"Little pig, little pig, let me in. . . I'll huff and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house in."

The only difference was that this wasn't a little pig. It was a big pig. But the wolf was very real.

Stanley Bingham still had moments of cold, clear sanity. These were the moments during which he thought and acted purely as a man.

The strange alchemy that was going on in his body was not happening entirely accidentally. It had a connection with other factors in his life. Dexter. His hatred of Dexter. He was changing into a wolf, or a wolf-man, because somehow, in some deep psychological sense that only his subconscious understood, the wolf was the animal most proper to slaughter a pig. It had all been triggered off by Dexter therefore.

There were times when the realization of his plight simply terrified him. But there were other times when he was just a trifle proud and happy with the trend of events. After all, the Stanley Bingham of old had been a meek, helpless sort of little man. And now he was fast becoming a wolf, a predator, a creature to be feared.

The change was emphasizing his superiority over Dexter too. Alvina had been so fond of reminding him how creative and intellectual Dexter was, while he was stupid, unimaginative, a wage slave. But in the animal kingdom their roles were somewhat reversed. Dexter was the mindless mound of pork,

dumb, unobservant, unaware of anything in the world except his trough, unaware even of danger, blissfully awaiting his execution. Whereas he, Stanley Bingham, was the thing of steel and muscle, strong jaws and sharp teeth, cunning, ruthless, the dreaded destroyer.

In the half-mad, mysterious world where the physical and the psychological met and clashed on dim, mist-shrouded boundaries, the pig had begotten the wolf. But the wolf would devour the pig.

Only one question, one doubt, confronted Stanley Bingham. Not whether he would murder Dexter, and probably Alvina too. But whether, once he'd accomplished the purpose for which he'd become a wolf—that is, to eat the pig—would he remain a wolf, or would he change back to being a man again.

To one about to commit a murder this question had serious implications. For either as man or as wolf, he desperately wanted to survive. And this was a society of men, controlled by men. Once a man—they wouldn't appreciate the fact that Dexter was only a pig—but once a man was killed, the police would hunt the killer. If this killer was to survive, it was urgent for him to discover whether he had to accomplish his survival as human or as animal. It would make a difference in his method of murder, and in his method of evasion or escape.

CRY WOLF!

He decided finally that he needed to test himself, to determine which strain was dominant in him. He couldn't predict with certainty what would happen to him after he murdered Dexter, so he would have to be content with discovering just what he was immediately prior to the murder. He was a werewolf, but in the present stage of his evolution, was he more man, or was he more wolf?

His first test was simple. Alvina kept a full refrigerator these days, in order to cater to Dexter's desire for both quantity and variety. It wasn't too easy to find a time when Alvina was absent from the kitchen, what with the time she spent there concocting three meals and four snacks every day for Dexter. But he managed it when she was out shopping.

He wanted to try raw pork, but he'd heard of the parasites in raw pork that could cause trichinosis. And he still had a human caution about diseases. So he chose a plump little cube steak. It was raw, limp, and exuded red juices. Somewhat gingerly he took a bite out of it, chewed vigorously, and swallowed. The results were confusing. The uncooked beef didn't taste as bad as he'd been afraid it might. But he didn't exactly relish the primitive sustenance. He didn't finish the little steak.

He tried to think of a more definitive test. What was he, man or wolf? More one? More the other?

What could tell him? Who could tell him? *Who?* That was an interesting, speculation.

Could he actually be examined scientifically and get himself neatly labeled? By whom? A psychiatrist? A doctor? A biologist? Zoologist? Stanley considered these scholarly gentlemen, tried to picture their reaction to a werewolf. The prospect was dismal. They would be sure to cage him, commit him, arrest him, or otherwise prevent his killing Dexter. Well, who could give him the answer safely then?

The answer was so simple that he felt he really must be losing his intelligence not to have thought of it instantly. If one of the human species could not be trusted, why not try one of the animal species?

A discreet inquiry at the city zoo elicited the bad news. Although the establishment contained beasts from the faraway continents, many more native types were lacking. There were no wolves.

A dog then. That seemed a logical possibility, dogs and wolves being rather kindred. But not some little lap dog like a poodle or a Pekingese that was the descendant of a thousand pampered generations. No, rather some dog closer to the wild state, a large, fierce, blood-thirsty canine more like Stanley knew himself to be.

He was several days in the search. But when he found him, he knew that he was exactly what he wanted.

He didn't know what kind the

dog was, or how incongruously he came to be there. But he was a huge, mangy male, with scraggly, unkempt, grayish brown coat, a narrow, wicked-looking head, tufted, scarred ears, and long jaws. He looked old and wise, possibly more wolf than dog. He brooded at the end of his chain.

The place was a semi-wooded but somehow ugly area at the edge of the city, inhabited by trash haulers and fireplace wood cutters. The dog was tied near an isolated one-room shack, the occupant of which was away all day. It was the best opportunity Stanley would ever have.

He parked his car a quarter of a mile down the road and walked. On the way he looked down at the backs of his hands. The hair was thick, coarse, matted. He felt his head. There was no illusion about it. If allowed to grow freely, the hair on his head would be like a mane.

He noted other things about himself too. There was a tension, an awareness, an inbred caution in his step, as with any animal that walks in the dangerous, unpredictable world of nature. It wasn't the free, careless stride of a man. He sniffed the air with animal curiosity, and his eyes probed constantly from side to side, ever alert.

The dog, of course, had both heard him and smelled him coming. Stanley, as he drew closer, slowed his pace. He and the dog consid-

ered each other with instinctive suspicion. Stanley stopped just beyond the length of the chain and pondered his next move.

The dog was a big brute. His eyes had yellow in them and the same color was on the two fangs that showed under the curled lip. His attitude looked neither friendly nor unfriendly. The dog hadn't decided yet.

And how do I feel toward him, Stanley wondered. There was one thing certain. In the old days he wouldn't have come nearly this close to an animal like this. In fact he'd probably been rather afraid of dogs. But now he did feel something different. A kinship maybe. A common fate.

"Tell me, old-timer," Stanley began soothingly, "what do you think of me? What do you think I am anyway?"

The dog stared back at him, the hairs along his back bristling warningly. The chain was stout and adequate, but it was stretched almost taut from the tree to the dog's thick leather collar.

"I think I know how you feel, Rover," Stanley went on softly. "One old male of the species doesn't exactly fawn on another. Or are you enough of a dog to be an enemy of a wolf? Or do you feel like that because you think I'm a man?"

It was still puzzling. The dog couldn't speak to answer those questions. And hostility could mean anything.

Stanley came at last to a bold decision. The dog was big, weighed close to a hundred pounds perhaps. But Stanley was actually bigger, at a hundred and forty or so. And a dog, even as little domesticated as this one, would fear a wild canine, wouldn't he? Therefore Stanley must cease acting as his man self and begin acting as his wolf self.

He dropped instantly to all fours and uttered a low growl. Just as quickly, his bristles rising higher, the dog retreated several steps, walking backward.

Stanley pursued his advantage. He pressed forward and growled again. The sound was more convincing this time, more menacing. The dog jumped, retreating.

Inside Stanley Bingham there was a wild elation then that no civilized man could ever experience. He felt savage, vengeful. This dog hadn't harmed him, but he was a natural enemy. Wolves ran in packs only when necessary, when they had to pool their combined strength. There was kinship in the animal kingdom, but no love. He'd teach this mangy cur who was the ruler here. He leaped.

The dog met the charge, wonderingly perhaps, but cunningly, resourcefully. He charged too, but swerved, and lowered his head at the last moment, his jaws going straight for the enemy's jugular.

"You're so clever, Dexter," Alvina said after the funeral.

They were sitting at the dinner table. Dexter had finished the fried chicken, and his plate was piled high with clean bones. He sat back finally, patting his paunch.

"You're a good cook, Alvina," he said.

She beamed under the praise. "Stanley never appreciated me."

"Then you don't mind about losing Stanley?"

"Of course not," she said. "I needed him to support me for a while. But now I have you, and you'll be rich. You will take care of me, won't you, Dexter?"

"Will you go on cooking for me?"

"I'd love to."

"Then you'll always have a home, dear sister. I'll be rich, as you say. I'll be able to afford a dozen servants, including cooks. French chefs if I want 'em. But I prefer home cooking, you know."

She brought the dessert, mincingly, like a slave queen presenting tribute jewels to an emperor. Chocolate cake, with marshmallow

frosting an inch thick. There was an affectionate, ecstatic silence while Dexter forked the concoction into his mouth.

"Excellent," he answered.

Later, when the cake was gone, Alvina asked a question suddenly. "Why did the hair grow on the backs of his hands?"

"I suppose he must have rubbed his hands together as he applied the stuff."

She giggled. "And Stanley didn't think my brother was an inventor. What are you going to call it, Dexter?"

"It should be a simple name," he answered modestly. "What about just 'Dexter's Hair Grower and Restorer?'"

She had a moment of vindictiveness. "I wish Stanley could see what's going to happen."

And Dexter had his moment of generosity. "Yes, it's too bad," he agreed. "Because he did contribute, after all. He was . . . what you might call . . . my guinea pig."



AT TEN MINUTES to five the Mexican kid finished sweeping the floor. He stood by the counter, leaning on his broom and looking at the big white-faced clock.

"Go on home," Brad told him. "Nobody's going to want any lamb chops delivered any more. You're

for the freezer, Mr. Malden. You get in there, man, nobody can get you out."

"I'll be careful."

"I'll see you, Mr. Malden."

"Yeah," Brad said. "Sure."

The kid walked out. Brad watched the door close after him,

FROZEN STIFF

Just one more minute and he would have done it himself and died happy . . . without knowing.

BY LAWRENCE BLOCK

through, go get some rest."

The kid flashed teeth in a smile. He took off his apron and hung it on a peg, put on a poplin wind-breaker.

"Take it easy," Brad said.

"You stayin' here?"

"For a few minutes," Brad said. "I got a few things to see to." The kid walked to the door, then turned at the last moment. "You watch out

then walked behind the meat counter and leaned over it, his weight propped up on his elbows. He was a big man, heavy with muscle, broad-faced and barrel-chested. He was forty-six, and he looked years younger until you saw the furrowed forehead and the drawn, anxious lines at the corners of his mouth. Then he looked fifty.

He took a deep breath and let it

out slowly. He picked a heavy cleaver from a hook behind him, lifted it high overhead and brought it down upon a wooden chopping block. The blade sank four inches into the block.

Strong, he thought. Like an ox.

He left the cleaver in the block. The freezer was in the back, and he walked through a sawdust-covered hallway to it. He opened the door and looked inside. Slabs of beef hung from the ceiling. Other cuts and sections of meat were piled on the floor. There were cleavers and hooks on pegs in the walls. The room was very cold.

He looked at the inside of the door. There was a safety latch there, installed so that the door could be opened from the inside if a person managed to lock himself in.

Two days ago he had smashed the safety latch. He broke it neatly and deliberately with a single blow of the cleaver, and then he told the Mexican kid what had happened.

"Watch yourself in the cold bin," he had told the kid. "I busted the goddam latch. That door shuts on you and you're in trouble. The room's soundproof. Nobody can hear you if you yell. So make damn sure the door's open when you're in there."

He told Vicki about it that same night. "I did a real smart thing today," he said. "Broke the damn safety latch on the cold bin door."

"So what?" she said.

"So I got to watch it," he said. "The door shuts when I'm in there and there's no way out. A guy could freeze to death."

"You should have it fixed."

"Well," he had said, shrugging, "one of these days."

He stood looking into the cold bin for a few more moments now. Then he turned slowly and walked back to the front of the store. He closed the door, latched it. He turned off the lights. Then he went back to the cold bin.

He opened the door. This time he walked inside, stopping the door with a small wooden wedge. The wedge left the door open an inch or so. He took a deep breath, filling his lungs with icy air.

He looked at his watch. Five-fifteen, it read. He took another breath and smiled slowly, gently, to himself.

By eight or nine he would be dead.

It started with a little pain in the chest. Just a twinge, really. It hurt him when he took a deep breath, and sometimes it made him cough. A little pain—you get to expect them now and then when you pass forty. The body starts to go to hell in one way or the other and you get a little pain from time to time.

He didn't go to the doctor. What the hell, a big guy like Brad Malden, he should go to the doctor like a kid every time he gets a little pain? He didn't go to the doctor. Then the pain got worse, and he

started getting other pains in his stomach and legs, and he had a six-letter idea what it was all about.

He was right. By the time he went to a doctor, finally, it was inoperable. "You should have come in earlier," the doctor told him. "Cancer's curable, you know. We could have taken out a lung—"

Sure, he thought. And I could breathe with my liver. Sure.

"I want to get you to the hospital right away," the doctor had said.

And he asked, reasonably, "What the hell for?"

"Radium treatments. Radical surgery. We can help you, make the pain easier, delay the progress of the disease—"

Make me live longer, he had thought. Make it last longer, and hurt longer, and cost more.

"Forget it," he said.

"Mr. Malden—"

"Forget it. Forget I came to you, understand? I never came here, I never saw you, period. Got it?"

The doctor did not like it that way. Brad didn't care whether he liked it or not. He didn't have to like it. It wasn't his life.

He took a breath again and the pain was like a knife in his chest. Like a cleaver. Not for me, he thought. No lying in bed for a year dying by inches. No wasting away from two hundred pounds to eighty pounds. No pain. No dribbling away the money on doctors and hospitals until he was gone and there was nothing left for Vicki but

a pile of bills that the insurance would barely cover. Thanks, doc. But no thanks. Not for me.

He looked again at his watch. Five-twenty. Go ahead, he told himself angrily. Get rid of the wedge, shut the door, lie down and go to sleep. It was cold, and you closed your eyes and relaxed, and bit by bit you got numb all over. Go ahead, shut the door and die.

But he left the wedge where it was. No rush, he thought. There was plenty of time for dying.

He walked to the wall, leaned against it. This was the better way. In the morning they would find him frozen to death, and they would figure logically enough that the wedge had slipped and he had frozen to death. Vicki would cry over him and bury him, and the insurance policy would pay her a hundred thousand dollars. He had fifty-thousand dollars of straight life insurance with a double indemnity clause for accidental death, and this could only be interpreted as an accident. With that kind of money Vicki could get a decent income for life. She was young and pretty, they didn't have any kids, in a few years she could remarry and start new.

Fine.

The pain came, and this time it was sharp. He doubled over, clutching at his chest. God, he hoped the doctor would keep his mouth shut. Though it would still go as accidental death. It had to. No one

committed suicide by locking himself in a cold bin. They jumped out of windows, they slashed their wrists, they took poison, they left the gas jets on. They didn't freeze themselves like a leg of lamb. Even if they suspected suicide, they had to pay the claim. They were stuck with it.

When the next stab of pain came he couldn't stand any longer. It had been hell trying not to wince, trying to conceal the pain from Vicki. Now he was alone; he didn't have to hide it. He hugged both hands to his chest and sank slowly to the floor. He sat on a slab of bacon, then moved the slab aside and sat on the floor. The floor was very cold. Hell, he thought, it was funny to sit in the cold bin. He'd never spent much time there before, just walked in to get some meat or hang some up. It was a funny feeling, sitting on the floor.

How cold was it? He wasn't sure exactly. The thermostat was outside by the door; otherwise the suicide wouldn't have been possible, since he could have turned up the temperature. The damn place was a natural, he thought. A death trap.

He put his hand to his forehead. Getting cold already, he thought. It shouldn't take too long, not at this rate. And he didn't even have the door closed. He should close the door now. It would go a little faster with the door closed.

Could he smoke a cigarette?

Sure, he thought. Why not?

He considered it. If they found the cigarette they would know he'd had a smoke before he froze to death. So? Even if it were an accident, a guy would smoke, wouldn't he? Besides, he'd make damn sure they'd think he tried to get out. Flail at the door with the cleaver, throw some meat around, things like that. They wouldn't make a federal case out of a goddam cigarette.

He took one out, put it between his lips, scratched a match and lighted it. He smoked thoughtfully, wincing slightly when the pain gripped his chest like a vise. A year of this? No, not for him. The quick death was better.

Better for him. Better for Vicki, too. God, he loved that woman! Too much, maybe. Sometimes he got the feeling that he loved her too hard, that he cared more for her than she did for him. Well, it was only natural. He was a fatheaded butcher, not too bright, not much to look at. She was twenty-six and beautiful and there were times when he couldn't understand why she had married him in the first place. Couldn't understand, but remained eternally grateful.

The cigarette warmed his fingers slightly. They were growing cold now, and their tips were becoming numb. All he had to do was flip the wedge out. It wouldn't take long.

He finished the cigarette, put it

out. He was on his way to get rid of the wedge when he heard the front door open.

It could only be Vicki, he thought. No one else had a key. He heard her footsteps, and he smiled quickly to himself. Then he heard her voice and he frowned.

"He must be here," she was saying. Her voice was a whisper. "In the back."

"Let's go."

A man's voice, that one. He walked to the cold bin door and put his face to the one-inch opening. When they came into view he stiffened. She was with a man, a young man. He had a gun in one hand. She went into his arms and he kissed her, hard.

Vicki, he thought! God!

They were coming back now. He moved away, moved back into the cold bin, waiting. The door opened and the man was pointing a gun at him and he shivered. The pain came, like a sword, and he was shaking. Vicki mistook it for fear and grinned at him.

She said, "Wait, Jay."

The gun was still pointing at him. Vicki had her hand on the man's arm. She was smiling. Evil, Brad thought. Evil.

"Don't shoot him," she was saying. "It was a lousy idea anyway. Killed in a robbery—who the hell robs a butcher shop? You know how much dough he takes in during a day? Next to nothing."

"You got a better way, Vicki?"

"Yes," she said. "A much better way."

And she was pulling Jay back, leading him away from the door. And then she was kicking the wooden wedge aside, and laughing, and shutting the door. He heard her laughter, and he heard the terribly final sound the door made when it clicked shut, and then he did not hear anything at all. They were leaving the shop, undoubtedly making all sorts of sounds. The cold bin was soundproof. He heard nothing.

He took a deep, deep breath, and the pain in his chest knocked him to his knees.

You should have waited, he thought. One more minute, Vicki, and I could have done it myself. Your hands would be clean, Vicki. I could have died happy, Vicki. I could have died not knowing.

You're a bitch, Vicki.

Now lie down, he told himself. Now go to sleep, just the way you planned it yourself. Nothing's different. And you can't get out, because you planned it this way. You're through.

Double indemnity. The bitch was going to collect double indemnity!

No, he thought. No.

It took him fifteen minutes to think of it. He had to find a way, and it wasn't easy. If they thought about murder they would have her, of course. She'd left prints all over

the cold-bin door. But they would not be looking for prints, not the way things stood. They'd call it an accident and that would be that. Which was the trouble with setting things up so perfectly.

He could make it look like suicide. That might cheat her out of the insurance. He could slash his wrists or something, or—

No.

He could cheat her out of more than the insurance.

It took awhile, but he worked it out neatly. First he scooped up his cigarette butt and stuck it in his pants pocket. Then he scattered the ashes around. Step one.

Next he walked to the rear of the cold bin and took a meat cleaver from the peg on the wall. He set the cleaver on top of a hanging side of beef, gave the meat a push. The cleaver toppled over and plummeted to the floor. It landed on the handle and bounced.

He tried again with another slab of meat. He tried time after time, until he found the piece that was

just the right distance from the floor and found just the spot to set the cleaver. When he nudged the meat, the cleaver came down, turned over once, and landed blade-down in the floor.

He tried it four times to make sure it would work. It never missed. Then he picked the cleaver from the floor, wiped his prints from blade and handle with his apron, and placed the cleaver in position on top of the hunk of meat. It was a leg of lamb, the meat blood-red, the fat sickly white. He sat down on the floor, then stretched out on his back looking up at the leg of lamb. Good meat, he thought. Prime.

He smiled, tensed with pain from his chest and stomach, relaxed and smiled again. Not quite like going to sleep this way, he thought. Not painless, like freezing. But faster.

He lifted a leg, touched his foot to the leg of lamb. He gave it a gentle little push, and the cleaver sliced through the air and found his throat.



THE BROAD MAN hunched over his desk like a bull-dog kept his slitted eyes unwaveringly on Nat Jacobs. "So you want to hire a bodyguard," the man said in a bleak hard voice. "Let's have the story."

Jacobs, a well-tailored and well-barbered figure with plump pinkish cheeks said, "You need the details, Mr. Riley?"

"We need them," Riley said. "We gotta know what our man will be bucking."

Jacobs sighed. He didn't like this, didn't like to talk about his business, didn't care to deal with underworld characters, but he had no choice. The lawyer who had made this contact for him had said, "You've got to fight fire with fire, Nat," and he was right. It was a question of his life, and nothing but the best protection would do. No amateurs, no aging ex-police officers, nobody who might be hampered by scruples. He needed somebody dangerous and tough, merciless. Somebody alert and deadly as a snake, ready to strike first.

"Well, Mr. Riley," Jacobs said, "it's this way. I run a produce business, Tri-State Produce, maybe you heard of it? A large business, Mr. Riley, took me thirty years to build it up. I hire a lot of labor, got a big office staff too. I got trucks, equipment, warehouses. I buy all over the country, all over the world. Ask about Tri-State down at the docks. Thirty years it took me. Now a union wants to muscle in."

PRICE OF LIFE

Jacobs' life had been threatened. He'd hired Angelo, a bodyguard par excellence, to protect him. Jacobs looked across his office at Angelo . . . and shuddered.

BY
MICHAEL
ZUROY

"Unions are good for the working-man," observed Riley.

"This isn't a legitimate union. I pay my people O.K. No complaints. If they don't like the pay, they can always quit. No, Mr. Riley, this union is a front for a bunch of racketeers. Gangsters and hoods, if you'll excuse the expression."

"Go on," said Riley.

"They want their cut from my employees. They also got the nerve to demand a cut out of Tri-State's profits. Oh, they got a fancy name for it—Employer's Participating Fund, they call it, but it's just robbing me, nothing else. I been fighting them, Mr. Riley. I won't let them scare me, and I'm not letting them in. But two days ago, somebody shot at me when I left the office after working late."

"That right?" Riley said, unimpressed.

"I can handle everything else," Jacobs said. "But I can't protect myself. Don't know how. I'm a businessman, got things on my mind all the time, don't know what's going on around me. I got no muscle. I never shot a gun in my life. I figured it's time to call in professional help."

"That's playing it smart," Riley growled. "We'll take you on. But it'll cost you." He named a figure.

Jacobs winced, but nodded his head. "If it'll keep me alive, O.K. You giving me a top man?"

"The best," Riley said. He punched a button on the intercom

on his desk. "Angelo?" he said into it. "Come up here. Got an assignment for you."

After a while, the door opened and a man slid into the room. Jacobs stared at him. Was this supposed to be a hood, a tough guy?

Angelo was of medium height, but scrawny. His eyes were bulbous behind thick glasses and seemed to roll constantly. He had a tiny mustache, thick soft lips and protruding teeth. He wore his black hair long around his ears and neck, but combed sleekly back. The expression on his face was amiably vapid.

His royal blue suit, square-shouldered, pleated and pegged flapped on his meager frame as he walked to an upholstered chair with bouncing, effeminate steps. He sat down and switched on the radio set near the chair. "They were playing Scheherazade. You called me in the middle of it," he said reproachfully to Riley. "Wait a minute, maybe I can catch the end of it." His voice was high and tremulous. "Ah," he said with satisfaction as the music swelled into the room. He leaned back in his chair, rapt, eyes closing, mouth falling open.

Jacobs stared down at the large nostrils and at the exposed yellowish teeth. This, he thought, this is going to protect me?

The selection ended. Angelo switched off the radio and sat up. "O.K., boss, what's the scoop?"

"Excuse me, Mr. Riley," Jacobs said nervously. "I hate to say any-

thing, but this fellow, he looks like he would fall apart if I slapped his wrist. I mean, maybe you don't understand me, Riley, but there are gangsters after my life. I need a rough character."

Riley didn't exactly smile, but something in his face suggested it. "I wouldn't advise you to slap Angelo's wrist. I wouldn't try it myself. Now, look, Jacobs, you know what kind of a mob we are. Violence is our stock in trade. We hire out goons and we stop at nothing, but once we take your money, you're a client and we do our best for you. You can trust us right down the line, Jacobs. Believe me, you got a savage boy here and as capable as they come. Angelo knows his business."

Jacobs still looked skeptical.

"I want you to have confidence in us," Riley said. "Come on down the basement. Angelo will demonstrate."

The basement was set up as a shooting gallery, with one end heavily sandbagged. At the other end, a mirror hung on the wall. "Face the mirror, Angelo," Riley said, and amiably Angelo obeyed. He looked sleepy and moronic.

Riley pressed a button and at the far end of the basement a bulls-eye target appeared at the ceiling and began rapidly dropping towards the floor on guide cords.

Jacobs couldn't follow the flashing motion of Angelo's hand. The automatic seemed to have sprung

out from under the man's lapel. Watching the target in the mirror, Angelo sent off five shots over his shoulder so closely spaced that they sounded like one long dull thud in the soundproofed room.

Riley sauntered over and brought back the target. The bull's eye was shot out. Not one bullet had missed the inner circle.

"Talent," Riley said. "Just one of Angelo's talents. Never mind how he looks. This boy's got it."

Jacobs nodded, impressed.

"What you got to do," Riley said, "you got to put yourself under Angelo's guidance. What he tells you to do, you do it if you want to stay alive. Where you go, Angelo goes, home, office, visiting, anywhere Understand?"

Jacobs nodded. It wasn't an inviting prospect, being so closely tied to this moldy looking character, but if it had to be, it had to be.

"Tell him about the hi-fi, boss," Angelo said in his shaky voice.

"Oh, yes. Angelo's nuts about music. I guess you noticed that. Wherever he stays, you got to provide a hi-fi set. Part of the deal."

"All right," said Jacobs. "A hi-fi set. Anything else?"

"That's it."

The following day, Angelo moved into Jacobs' office.

Angelo prowled about the private room, his bulbous eyes rolling, lips hanging away from his teeth. "Gotta change the position of your desk," Angelo pronounced. "You're a

sucker for an angle shot through the window, here. My desk will go in that corner. You can stick a title on me, Special Secretary or something. When's the hi-fi set coming?"

"This afternoon."

"O.K.," Angelo said. "Put it next to my desk. You'll be all right now for a while. I'm going to look over the rest of your set-up. Don't come. I'll manage." Angelo sauntered out.

A half-hour later, a call came through to Jacobs from his office manager. The voice was perturbed. "Mr. Jacobs, there's a weird character roaming all over the place. What they call beat, I guess, but real beat. Poking into everything. Leering at the girls. Started to paw Miss Baxter and she ran screaming into the ladies' room. Telling me to rearrange our system. Claims he's acting for you. Is he crazy or something?"

Jacobs choked. "He's doing a special job for me," he made himself say. "Leave him alone. Don't put him out."

"Put him out?" The office manager's voice rose several notes. "Who can put him out? Bostock in Shipping already tried it. You know what a big husky fellow Bostock is? Well, he's bleeding in the infirmary, and this little character ain't got a mark on him. I was going to call the cops."

"No cops," Jacob said. "Tell Bostock I'll make it right with him. Tell Miss Baxter I'll make it right with her. This man's got to be with

us for a while, but I'll see if I can get him to behave."

"Mr. Jacobs, I don't understand this," said the office manager.

When Angelo slid back into his office, Jacobs said, "I heard you been bothering the girls. Do you got to do this to protect me?"

Angelo looked aggrieved. "I gotta have a little fun on a job. And kindly don't give me no orders. You're supposed to follow my orders, remember? That's what the boss said, ain't it?"

"All right," Jacobs said. "All right. But please."

"Tell you what I want you to do. . . ." Angelo said . . .

Under the new set-up ruled by Angelo, a lot of changes took place in Nat Jacobs' world. The frosted glass in the door of Jacobs' office came out to be replaced by one-way glass. From where Angelo sat, he could inspect anybody in the outer chamber presided over by Dora Brown, Jacobs' regular secretary, without being seen in return. A lock, operated by a buzzer from Angelo's desk, was installed in the door. Nobody, employee or visitor, got through that door without Angelo's O.K.

"But you don't know these people," Jacobs protested. "How do you know who's O.K. and who isn't?"

Angelo showed his mouthful of teeth. "I can spot a torpedo a mile away. Don't have to know 'em."

The arrangement of the outer

offices was changed. Partitions and doors were installed. The routine flow of office traffic was rerouted away from Jacobs' office. "Nobody gets near you," Angelo explained, "or your office. Without being screened. We ain't risking a snap shot. Or a bomb."

Angelo vetoed Jacobs' practice of going out to lunch. "Too risky," Angelo said. "From now on, you have your lunches sent up. You eat in this office. With me."

Jacobs regarded Angelo sourly. Did he have to have this pest as a table companion too? "But food like I been getting at Honig's Restaurant the past twenty years got to be rushed to the table from the kitchen. It can't be sent up. It'll spoil."

"Too bad," Angelo said. "Me, what I like is sardines. Lots of sardines. With rye bread and onions. Order me a supply."

Angelo had the drawers of his desk stocked with canned sardines, rye bread and onions. "Nothing else to put in there," he said. All day long, Angelo munched on sardines and onions. All day, he kept the hi-fi set going. The atmosphere in Jacobs' office turned into a powerful mixture of music, fish and onions. Scheherazade was Angelo's favorite. Jacobs thought, with disbelief, that once he had liked Scheherazade too. And sardines. And onions. Now, he could hardly bear to sit in his own office.

When people came to see Jacobs

on business, he was ashamed. No matter how important the visitor, there sat Angelo never taking his bulging, eyeglassed eyes off the man. The hi-fi set blared so that they had to shout. (Angelo refused to turn it off. "Part of the deal," he'd protested Jacobs' request, looking hurt.) The smell was so bad that the visitor looked stunned. In a minute or so, he'd pull out a handkerchief. In another few minutes, he'd leave, with a queer glance at Jacobs and Angelo. Nobody finished his business. Nothing got done. Customers began to take their trade elsewhere.

It got so that Jacobs couldn't stand even looking at Angelo. He'd never thought he could dislike anyone so intensely. The little mustache, the big teeth, the mushy mouth, the long black hair, the scrawny body in the flapping suit filled him with repulsion.

And he had to live with the man constantly.

Because it wasn't only at the office. Wherever Jacobs went, Angelo went. When Jacobs left the office, Angelo preceded him, his eyes rolling everywhere. Jacobs couldn't even set his own hours. "We don't leave with the mob," Angelo laid down the law. "Too much can happen in a mob. And we don't leave the same time every day. Nothing like a routine to make things easy for torpedoes."

Angelo rushed him from his building to his chauffeured car

when he wanted to go someplace. Angelo sat in the back seat with him, strong breath filling the confined space. Angelo didn't allow him to walk in the street. ("We ain't providing no easy targets," Angelo said.)

Worst of all was that Angelo went home with him. He ate in his home. He slept in his home.

Jacobs lived on the tenth floor in a six room apartment with his wife, Rose. They lived alone, except for a maid—the children were married and out of the state.

"Nat," Rose said to him in private after one week of Angelo, "what is this? What kind of a creep did you bring home?"

"I told you," Jacobs said bitterly. "He's protecting me."

"But Nat, he smells."

"If he wants to smell, he can smell. He's the boss."

"He goes to the refrigerator. He eats anything he wants."

Jacobs shrugged.

"He don't let me watch my television programs," Mrs. Jacobs went on. "Says it interferes with the hi-fi. He didn't turn off the hi-fi for a minute last night."

"All right," Jacobs said. "No television."

"He's bothering the maid. She complained about him. Threatened to quit if he stays."

"So we'll get a man servant," Jacobs said. "He bothers the girls at the office."

"Nat, what's got into you? How

can you put up with this creep? Besides, he don't look like he could protect a fly."

"There, you're wrong," Jacobs said. "But how I put up with him, I can't tell you."

One day, Jacobs got Riley on the phone. "Mr. Riley," he said hesitantly, "I don't want to complain—but do you think you can send me another man instead of Angelo?"

Riley's voice came cold and hard. "We don't switch men in the middle of a job. Angelo's a good man. Still alive, ain't you?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"I know who that mob is that's after you," Riley said. "Without Angelo, you wouldn't last a day. I know he's a little peculiar some ways, but you can stand it if you want to keep on living. Good-bye."

Still, Jacobs was on the verge of throwing the whole thing up, walking around without protection or capitulating to the racketeers—anything to get rid of Angelo—when the day came that Angelo proved himself.

Jacobs was returning from a business visit. They were driving along a quiet street, Johnson the chauffeur, Jacobs and Angelo. Angelo seemed to be almost asleep in the corner of the back. Jacobs sat stiffly across the seat from him.

Jacobs never would have believed that a human could move that fast. A bolt of lightning, yes. A radio wave, yes. Not a human. One in-

stant, Angelo was sitting there looking stupid. The next, he was leaning out his window firing a fusillade of shots at something behind them. In another instant, he was sprawled across Jacobs' lap holding a second gun, firing out Jacobs' side.

Too much was happening at once for Jacobs to understand it. The car leaped ahead as Johnson's foot came down on the pedal in fright. Angelo was lying on his lap, a small hysterical chuckle frothing from his thick lips. Two uncertain shots sounded from their rear.

Jacobs turned his head and looked out the rear window. A couple of cars were veering crazily on the street behind them, and as Jacobs watched one of them crashed into a lamp-post and the other into a store front. The sound of the crashes thundered in his ears.

"Two of them," Angelo chuckled, still hysterically, as their car sped from the scene. "Thought they'd bracket us, take us from each side. Had tommy guns, too. Boy, I sure fooled them, didn't I, Jake? Wasn't that the most fun, Jake?"

Jacobs comprehended that Angelo had saved his life. He sat there dully, understanding this, and knowing that he should feel grateful to Angelo. He should be feeling scared, but grateful.

Only, it was a terrible thing, Jacobs thought, he wasn't feeling scared, he wasn't feeling grateful. That he had had a close call didn't

seem to matter. The only thing he was feeling was disgust and repulsion that Angelo was so close to him. He couldn't stand the man's touch. He couldn't stand the sight of the little mustache and loose lips. He couldn't stand the onion and fish smell. Jacobs realized that he hated Angelo.

"Thank you," Jacobs said. "Thank you very much."

Angelo righted himself and went back to his seat. His feet began jiggling on the floor of the car. He began humming a tune and laughing now and then with a peculiar intake of breath. Jacobs realized that he had been stimulated by the action. An animal, Jacobs thought, drawing himself further away. A rabid animal.

There was no rest from Angelo. He was in the house with them all night. If they had guests, Angelo was there, awkwardly introduced as a friend. If they were invited out, Angelo went along. His manners caused raised eyebrows and stares, but what could they do?

He slept in the next bedroom. He snored, the most penetrating snores Jacobs had ever heard. Even his wife's snores were weak by contrast.

Jacobs shuddered every morning when he opened his eyes. He knew that in a few minutes he would have to watch the sight of Angelo in a robe walking around the house. In a few minutes, the hi-fi would go on, playing Scheherazade.

There would be Angelo at breakfast. Angelo making coarse remarks to his wife. Angelo going down in the elevator with him. Angelo in his car. Angelo in his office, all day, eating sardines and onions. Angelo repelling the customers. Angelo coming home with him at night. Angelo at the dinner table. Angelo and his terrible music. Angelo and his smell and grotesque appearance. Angelo, always Angelo.

How long?

Jacobs' wife asked that question too. "How long, Nat? How long do we gotta stand from him?"

Jacobs had been considering it. When would the danger be over? When would the mob give up? Had they given up already. Had Angelo discouraged them?

The answer to that came a week after Angelo had gunned the two cars. They were leaving the Tri-State offices, walking along the corridor towards the elevators. It was after hours, and the corridor was deserted. Suddenly, Angelo stiffened and shot a warning arm against Jacobs' midriff. Jacobs stopped.

Angelo pounced around a corner, and Jacob heard a violent smacking sound, as though something fleshy had been hit. Jacobs peeked.

Two men were standing there; together they carried perhaps four times as much beef as Angelo. But, like a weasel, Angelo was darting back and forth between them, mauling them. One of them was doubled

over, clutching his belly. As Jacobs watched, Angelo rose on one toe and the point of his shoe caught the other under the chin. The man went down like a blob of lead. The first man straightened and pulled a knife. Angelo caught the knife hand and did something complex. The man screamed and Jacobs distinctly heard a bone crack. The knife dropped.

Contemptuously, Angelo pulled the two slack bodies to the exit door and threw them down the stairs to the floor below. He looked at Jacobs and giggled. "They're alive," he said to Jacobs. "Guess they'll manage to drag themselves away later. But if they don't, you don't know anything about this, understand, Jake? No cops on this deal. We can't afford cops."

"Certainly," Jacobs said. "I understand."

He gave Angelo a bonus after this. A wad of bills for himself. The man had saved his life twice. He should be grateful. He should show his appreciation. Well, the bills were appreciation.

But he still couldn't stand Angelo.

Anyway, a question had been answered. The mob wasn't discouraged. They were still out to get him.

He should have dealt with them in the first place. Why had he gotten himself into this? How long could he go on this way? Where was an end?

It came to Jacobs with a shock

that there wasn't any end. Gangsters had long memories. Suppose things were quiet? Suppose, finally, he discharged Angelo? What guarantee did he have that they wouldn't murder him a month later, a year later?

In a panic, Jacobs realized that there was only one answer—what he should have done at the beginning. . . . Make a deal with the mob. Play ball. Or keep Angelo forever.

Jacobs had a certain telephone number. He had never used it. Now he used it. It was a way of contacting the mob.

After Jacobs had finished explaining into the phone, the dry voice at the other end chuckled without amusement. "After what your goon did to our boys you want to make a deal, hey?" it said. "It's a little late for that. Just a little late. You had your chance. Now, we're going to get you, Jacobs."

"But . . . but, wait a minute," stuttered Jacobs. "If it's a matter of terms . . ."

"No terms," the voice said coldly. "'We'll take over your place anyway . . . after you're out of the picture. We got patience. Sooner or later, Jacobs. Sooner or later.'" The phone went dead.

So.

Jacobs felt himself breaking out into a sweat. Without Angelo, he was a dead man. Even with Angelo, they might sometime succeed in murdering him.

The police? No, the police couldn't guard him day and night forever.

In desperation, one morning Jacobs put the problem to Angelo as they sat in the office.

Angelo picked a shred of sardine out of his teeth with a tooth-pick and, eyeing it with satisfaction pronounced, "It's either you or them, Jake."

"What?"

"You or them," Angelo repeated. "Simple, ain't it. They want to knock you off. You got to wipe them out first."

"The whole mob?"

"Ain't more than three or four that run the mob. Knock them off and your problems are over."

Jacobs considered this in silence. He said, "How?"

"Us," Angelo said. "You're paying us for protection, you got protection. You want something better, pay Riley the price and you'll get it. We do all classes of work."

It was as though a door had opened before Jacobs. A door to peace of mind and freedom. And freedom from Angelo.

"I'll pay," Jacob said hoarsely.

He made the arrangements with Riley over the phone. "Angelo's in charge," Riley said. "Any men he needs, I'll send him. Any way he wants to handle it, it's his baby."

This business settled, Angelo stood up and stretched. He yawned widely, and in a fascination of repulsion Jacobs stared at the big yel-

lowish teeth, the thick wet mouth, the magnified globes of the eyes behind the glasses. Jacobs regarded the stains of sardine oil on the loose royal-blue suit. He looked at the long greasy hair. He shuddered. It was hard to believe that someday there might be a life without Angelo. Someday, no music playing eternally, no smell of fish and onions, no embarrassment before people, no scrawny tyrant ruling every minute of his time.

"I'm going out to look over the set-up," Angelo said. "You'll be all right here for a few hours. I'll be back before closing time to take you home." Angelo went out, then stuck his head back in through the doorway. "I'm running low on sardines," he said. "Order me a new supply. You know my brand."

It was beautiful, the rest of that day. No Angelo. For the first time in weeks, no Angelo. It was such a blessed interval of peace and relaxation that Jacobs was sorry when the end of the day drew near, and with it the time for Angelo's return.

But Angelo did not return.

Jacobs waited. Almost quitting time, and no Angelo.

Quitting time, and no Angelo.

There was the stir and bustle outside as the offices began to empty. There was Dora, his secretary, saying good-night to him. There were the many footsteps in the corridors leading to the elevators.

Finally, there was the silence of a deserted building.

And still no Angelo.

Jacobs waited almost an hour and a half. Alone in his office. He knew that he should be worried. Maybe something had gone wrong. Maybe something had happened to Angelo. But somehow, all he was conscious of feeling was relief that he still didn't have to look at Angelo.

At last, Jacobs decided to go home. He couldn't sit here all night. His car would be waiting outside the building.

He walked out into the street, and spotted his car occupying a parking space near the corner.

As he turned up the street, two burly men fell into step with him. Something hard prodded his side. Unresisting, he was pulled into a car, and the car drove off.

Numbly, he sat and watched the streets go past. He tried to talk to the men. There were two in the front and two in the back with him. They ignored him.

By the time they had driven out of the city, it was dark. The car drove on for more than an hour. It left the main highways, and made so many turns and changes of direction that Jacobs lost track.

The car turned off the narrow road it had been travelling, pulled into a clearing between some trees and stopped. One man got out of the front. The two back doors opened and the other men got out, one of them pulling Jacobs along. The car headlights went off and somebody switched on a powerful

flashlight. The three men walked Jacobs to the far end of the clearing.

"O.K.," one of the men said suddenly. "Here we are." He pushed Jacobs roughly to a patch of darkness in the ground. "Stand here."

Jacobs could see that he was standing at the edge of a hole in the ground. A freshly dug hole.

A grave. They had already prepared his grave.

But it just wasn't real. The only real thing was that he'd been away from Angelo for all of six hours now. Six beautiful free hours. Clean, fresh, country air, fresh-turned earth. No sardines, no onions.

He was supremely happy. Suddenly he began a little dance on the edge of the hole. He whistled Scheherazade. Behind him an awed voice whispered, "What's the matter . . . the guy flipped?"

Jacobs had an unconquerable urge to leap into his grave, into the clean earth, into eternal escape from Angelo. He jumped with childish glee, and landed, more with outrage than horror, on a body. His nose told him . . .

"Angelo!"

It was a command.

He stood astride the body and his dumpy little figure seemed to grow. He glared balefully up at his cap-

tors who hovered like disconcerted vultures about the lip of the grave. One of them said in a hesitant, apologetic voice, "Yeah, we caught him snoopin' and croaked him this afternoon. We figured to . . ."

"Just a Goddam minute!"

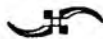
The men faded back as Jacobs, with outraged determination, hoisted himself up and out of the hole. The flashlight quivered as the man holding it retreated. The man with the gun stood, mouth agape, pistol dangling.

Nat Jacobs arose, grasped the astonished gunman by the lapels of his coat, and in a voice filled with the wrath of God, roared:

"In death there is dignity!"

Pandemonium broke. Men shouted. Guns roared and flamed. Glass shattered in the car. The flashlight arched high in the air and extinguished itself off in the woods. Somebody groaned. An engine roared, gears ground, and the car, collecting the debris of the woods in its fenders and bumper, lurched wildly around the clearing and careened down the narrow dirt road.

Silence returned. A brave cricket tentatively chirped. Nat Jacobs dusted the dirt of his grave from his clothes and set off with purposeful strides toward home.



*A
Novelette*

**BY
STEVE FRAZEE**

It was an extraordinary, impossible, unthinkable proposal. Yet Tom accepted it . . . because Marcus Brandt proposed it.

THE MORNING it started I was drinking coffee with Carl Prosser, Chief of Research, in the executives' lounge of McGraw-Whitson Co., Electronics Division, the Los Angeles plant. The intercom said, "Mr. Brandt will see Mr. Milstead at eleven o'clock."

Prosser grinned. He was a heavy, awkward man with brown hair that had made an orderly withdrawal about half way back on his head. "Thomas, come here. I want you." His mimicry of Marcus Brandt's voice was very good—and slightly irritating. "How about get-

ting in a plug for CF while you're there?"

CF, Character Factors, was the pet of Prosser's unapproved experimental projects. It was a method of evaluating human character by the reaction of the subject's brain tissue and nervous system to extremely weak rays.

Our Los Angeles plant made radar components and did research in radar, under government subsidy. Prosser had discovered what he called "sheathed" rays during our directed research program. The only practical application of the

rays so far was in CF, an interesting but off-the-beam field for us.

"No use, Carl," I said. "You know how Brandt feels about unproductive sidelines."

He banged his cup down on the coffee table. "Every machine we've created, including radar, has to be operated by human beings. We know the composition of the machine, but how about the men controlling it? We have no blueprints of a man's mind, Tom, but once CF is perfected—"

"I know. One in every personnel department." I shook my head. "No use asking Brandt. I know how he feels about it."

Prosser studied me slowly. "You do, huh? You think you know Marcus Brandt, do you?"

That irritated me. "Put it on the line."

Prosser hesitated. "What I mean is that no man knows himself, let alone another man. But with CF—"

"No. Stick to radar."

Prosser shrugged. You never defeat a truly dedicated research man; you merely sidetrack, bully, infuriate and frustrate him. Prosser finished his coffee and stumped out.

It was disturbing to have someone as brilliant as Prosser say that I didn't know Marcus Brandt. After eighteen years of close association with the man, I didn't know him? That was what Prosser had said flatly.

On my way to Brandt's office I stopped in Administration to see

Connie Treadwell, the office manager. She was slim and blond—and independent as hell. "Dinner tonight?" I asked.

"All right."

"What's the Old Man's problem?"

"As his fair-haired boy, don't you know?"

"I asked you a question, Connie."

"I really don't know why he wants to see you, unless the All-America boy brought in something."

"He's here?" Charlie Tracy was the All-America boy, vice-president of the board, inheritor of fifteen per cent of McGraw-Whitson stock.

"He was," Connie said.

"Thanks for the complete report on everything."

"Oh, you're welcome, Thomas."

"The dinner is still on, in spite of your sarcasm."

Maggie Burke, Old Functional, held me until five seconds before eleven, and then she nodded toward the door of Brandt's office.

"Sit down, Thomas." Brandt was 63, a lean, tanned man with craggy features and white hair with no tinge of corrupting yellow. Though he had never been an athlete, many people meeting him for the first time got the impression that he had been an outstanding football player.

Everything I knew of business, I had learned from Brandt. Topping that, he was the only friend I had. Just seeing him now healed the doubt that Prosser had created in

my mind. Marcus Brandt was my solid rock in a world that had not been too good to me before I met him.

Discounting all our association, except the previous year, and that would still be enough for me to have learned the very soul of Brandt. The year before I had been his strong right arm during the internecine fight for control of McGraw-Whitson.

Those had been great, exciting days. Brandt was chairman of the board then, and he had led the company on a program of expansion, into plastics, electronics, oil, steel fabrication and a dozen other activities, until we ran into a group of stockholders led by Joseph Rudell, who said Brandt was taking the company too fast and too far.

The bitter proxy fight began. Brandt's brilliant ability as an organizer made the Rudell interests look inept and stupid. As Brandt's hatchet man, charmer and executive, I was in the thick of things. We had the fight won until we were ambushed in a double-cross.

Suddenly, completely, we were beaten. Rudell booted us out to Los Angeles, to the smallest plant the company owned, and that was where he intended to keep us.

You learn more about a man in defeat than in winning. I guess I knew Marcus Brandt, if anyone did.

"Thomas," he said, "I think we're on our way again." His voice was calm, almost gentle.

Whatever it was, I was with him. Once you get a taste of bigness, the wanting becomes compulsive.

"By the way, I've just told Prosser to go ahead with CF," Brandt said.

The secret of not showing surprise lies in holding the lip muscles still. After that, the rest of the face will obey. I had learned that from Brandt, and now I used it. "Approved?" I asked.

"No. I gave the order. Take care of it, Thomas."

"I will." I would divert two men from Printed Circuits, still charging them to that project. The psychiatrist Prosser wanted could be called a consultant in personnel. It was dangerous because, while all other government supported McGraw-Whitson plants could, and did, get away with anything in private research, the board was just waiting to catch Brandt and me in an unapproved project.

But Brandt had ordered it; that was good enough for me.

Brandt rose. "We have an appointment." On the way out he told Maggie, "We'll be at the Hidalgo. Back at three."

The Hidalgo was a private trapshooting club down near Stanton. Every time Tracy was in town he got us down there to win a few dollars from us breaking clay pigeons. I supposed we had to go, though it would delay my finding out what big move Brandt had in the making.

I drove the company car. Brandt

lit his pipe and leaned back. He always enjoyed riding, but there were few drivers he trusted. "What are your plans with Miss Treadwell, Thomas?"

"None, so far. I don't know whether or not I'm fit to settle down into marriage."

"Be very sure." It sounded like an order. "What a beautiful day."

California was having unusual weather, a cobalt blue sky and sunshine. I was enjoying it too, but I wished that Brandt would get down to business.

After a mile or so, he said, "In this program coming up, I don't want you with me because of a sense of loyalty based on sentimental grounds. Just what do you think you owe me, Thomas?"

"Nothing." And then I wondered if I had spoken my own thought or what I knew Brandt wanted to hear.

He was pleased. "We understand each other."

The first time I ever saw Marcus Brandt was when I went to the New Jersey valve plant of McGraw-Whitson as a half starved kid trying to get a sweeping job so I could finish high school. The plant foreman told me to beat it. He said I was too scrawny to lift a broom. Angry and desperate, I challenged him to a fight.

By chance Brandt saw the scene. "Give him the job, Franks," he ordered. Six months later Franks got his chance. He caught me tinkering

with a lathe, and roughed me up a little. "You're fired, Milstead."

I knocked him cold with a wrench, and then I ran to Brandt's office and blurted out the story. Cold as stone he listened. "What do you want me to do?"

"Put me on a lathe. I'll be out of school next—"

"Idiot's work." He studied me for a long time. I thought I was finished. Then he said, "Go back and tell Franks you're still working here."

Thereafter, the foreman made it miserable for me but he was a minor worry. My drunken father died in an alley a week later, and two nights before my graduation from high school my mother died of narcotics intoxication.

Brandt knew all about it. He bought me a suit and made me go to graduation ceremonies. The next fall he sent me to engineering school.

Sentiment? Brandt detested it, and I prided myself on having cast all thought of it aside at the age of ten.

Brandt put on dark glasses. "Do you have any bitterness about your parents?"

"I don't even think about them any more."

"Oh? I've heard you say that anyone selling narcotics should be sentenced to death."

He caught me off guard. The old roiling hatred of everything pertaining to narcotics traffic swelled

in me. For a few moments I was driving automatically, savagely closing a gap between me and the car ahead. Almost too late I saw that traffic was slowing because of a truck jam in the fast flow of vehicles. Only Brandt's seat belt kept him from being thrown against the windshield when I braked.

"All right, you've proved your point!" I said angrily.

"And you scared the hell out of me, Thomas. During the next hour, however, I doubt that you'll let a question like that bother you. Right?"

After we got our guns and glasses out of the clubhouse, we found Tracy waiting on the line. Empty cases showed that he'd got in plenty of practice. He was a handsome bastard in spite of the soft overlay that was beginning to blur the trim look of him.

"Great to see you again, Tom, old boy," he said, smiling and shaking hands with me.

I smiled and was just as cordial as he was.

Charlie Tracy was the man who had gone over to Rudell, after standing with Brandt and me to the last moment in the proxy fight. I remember the afternoon in New York when I got the word about Tracy's switch. It was fifteen minutes before the board meeting. I ran across the hall and told Brandt.

For a full minute he sat stone faced, and then he laughed softly.

"We misjudged that man, Thomas, and that's fatal in this business. He held out until the other side was desperate, knowing they were beaten. Then he bargained smart. He knew we were going to use him and then throw him overboard. He took care of himself well, I'd say."

Tracy was all good humor today. "The usual five bucks on twenty-five birds?" he asked. "Or if you guys prefer, you can give me the money now and we'll go to lunch."

"We'll try, Charlie," I said. How small and ridiculous he was, I thought.

At eighteen I was one up on Tracy and Brandt was only one behind him. Tracy broke nineteen. Seconds before my turn, he said, "You know, I've always admired the way you threw off some bad childhood breaks, Tom. I was telling my wife about you just before I left."

"It was tough," I said. "I had to stand on a box to mug those drunks and hopheads around Perth Amboy, and my legs were so short I always got caught when I tried to run after stealing apples from push-carts."

Brandt smiled. Tracy gave me a dirty look. "Pull!" I called. Nineteen crossed from my right, my hardest shot. I powdered it.

Tracy kept trying. He knew how to hit low. But it didn't work. Both Brandt and I beat him for the first time. "How lucky can you get?" he said, as he forked over five dollars

to each of us. "How about another twenty-five?"

Brandt told him we had to get back early for a conference. He and Tracy walked to the clubhouse ahead of me, talking as they went, and then Tracy took off for an appointment in Hollywood.

As far as I was concerned, it was a wasted hour, but when we were eating lunch in the clubhouse, Brandt said, "He's never shared my confidence in you, Thomas, but now he's approved you for the new program."

"I'm sorry but I don't follow you."

"Sure you do. All his needling out there on the gun line about your early life—He thought you might be unstable under certain circumstances. You were somewhat unstable in the car, remember? That's why I warned you."

"Tracy was testing me? He always tries to shake me when we're shooting."

"Not quite like he did today, Thomas."

Tracy *had* been dirtier than usual, I thought. "What's the program, Marc?"

"We'll talk about it on the way back."

In the car, Brandt relaxed until he appeared to be on the point of dozing. I drove a mile before he spoke. "Thomas, do you believe a worthy end justifies any means?"

"We've followed that principle."

"But do you believe it?"

"Yes, I suppose I do."

"I'm sure you do. Suppose you and I were killed on the way back. How greatly would that affect operations at the plant?"

"There would be a temporary adjustment, I'd say, before we were replaced." I looked at the rushing traffic around us. We could get killed, sure enough.

"Suppose the key men at *every* McGraw-Whitson electronics plant were removed overnight?" Brandt asked.

"The way industry is moving today, that would be a heavy setback." I felt uneasy suddenly. "What are you getting at, Marc?"

"A sudden, nation-wide purge of crime leaders in a given field. A strike accomplished in a few hours."

"My God!"

"Doesn't it strike you as a worthy venture, Thomas?"

We came to a red light. A girl in a white convertible slid in beside us. I looked at her but I scarcely saw her. "The results would benefit society, yes, but—"

"The means stick in your craw, is that it? That's petty morality. We've crushed people in business. Remember Mattison, who went along with us in the Rudell fight? He shot himself when they took over his factory after we lost. Who killed him, Thomas? Who dragged a lot of people to ruin in that mess?"

"But that's business, you might say. Oh, yes. A holdup man is in business too, and when his victim

puts up a fight, he often gets killed. That's illegal business, eh? Of course it is, and I condemn it, not on the basis of illegality, but because it is stupid and benefits only one person, while removing from society someone who is possibly a good citizen."

I was slow getting away when the light changed.

"Our program, on the other hand, will benefit society on a very wide basis, while at the same time removing from it some of its most undesirable individuals." Brandt filled and lit his pipe. "What's your reaction, Thomas?"

He spoke as casually as if we were considering a problem at the plant.

"Is Tracy in this?" I asked.

"Oddly, it's his idea. Speed up a little."

I glanced at the speedometer. I had slowed to the legal limit, and everyone was passing us, giving us irritated or curious looks.

"Is he giving the orders?" I asked.

"He'll think so." Brandt smiled.

Tracy. At first, it was hard to believe, but the more I thought about him, the more logical it became. Ever since his graduation from school he had held some well paid position with McGraw-Whitson. First, because his father had been president of the board, until Brandt squeezed him out; later, because of the stock he had inherited.

In all those years Tracy had done nothing. He was no executive, al-

though he often complained that the company wouldn't allow him to do anything. All those years of sitting on the bench, watching the fast, aggressive action, telling himself he was as good as any man on the field, and knowing better.

His blow against Brandt and me had been his one big effort, but that had done nothing for his ambition. The vice-presidency he had bargained for was a bigger bargain for Rudell, for at one stroke it had given Tracy a nominal reward for his treachery and got him out of Rudell's way.

And now Tracy was out to prove something to himself.

He was a simpleton. If there was any profit in the "program," Brandt and I would take it, and break Tracy like a toothpick in the process. The shock I had felt at first mention of the idea gave way to rising interest.

"Where's the profit in this business?" I asked.

"In the usual meaning, none. I could say in public service, in the doing of something that will save this country billions of dollars. That's true enough but I'm far more interested in selfish considerations. You don't think I've forgiven Tracy for what he did to us, do you?"

Brandt's bitterness surprised me. I'd never heard him speak of revenge on Tracy. He'd always taught me that business allowed no personal feelings.

"Above that consideration is the satisfaction of planning, organizing and executing the biggest, most dangerous program any man ever attempted in this country. For a year we've been caged animals out here, Thomas. Now we can go to work again."

"The money?"

"Tracy. What else does he have? A good part of it can be charged off to company expenses."

"I don't like that last part," I said. "You know how Rudell's auditors —"

Brandt laughed. "That's odd, Thomas. I had the same feeling, and then I thought how ludicrous it was to swallow the whole program, but to gag on the idea of violating company principle. We think alike, and that proves that I trained you well."

For a moment I didn't like his implication of ownership, but I brushed the thought aside.

We got on the freeway and from there to the plant neither of us spoke again. As we drove toward Administration, I looked around at the orderly sprawl of the buildings and was struck by the thought that all this was not, after all, the backwash of inaction that I had been considering it for a year. In fact, I had been happy with my work here.

We got out of the car. Brandt eyed me sharply. "Doubts?" he asked.

"Some, yes. It seems to me that

we'll have a lot of groundwork before we can make any start toward the actual planning."

"That has all been done, Thomas."

"Oh?"

"Tracy's Coordination Expeditors."

Organization of the CE group was the one thing Rudell had allowed Tracy to do. They were eager young lawyers and accountants who moved from plant to plant to determine whether or not company policy was being properly observed in all departments. Snoopers. They'd hit us three times and they'd strained hard to find a few faults in our operations.

Brandt had assigned me to buttering them up and giving them the old Hollywood whirl. They were not stupid young men by any means, and the only reason we'd had no repercussions from their visits was the simple fact that the Los Angeles plant was a tautly run operation.

Now I saw the CE hotshots in a new light. "I've been way behind, Marc."

"You'll catch up fast enough. Right now, stay on top of the CF project." Brandt walked toward his office.

As I went through the compact laboratories of Research on my way to find Prosser, I glanced at the familiar faces of men busy with projects and thought again about how well I had liked it here.

Prosser was in his office with a dark-haired, solemn-looking man whom he introduced as Dr. William Lucero, a psychiatrist to round out the CF research team. "He already has security clearance from work he just finished with Holton-Meyers," Prosser explained. "Now I'd like to have Feathers and Veltrie from Circuits. Okay?"

"Take them. No transfers or re-assignments. Dr. Lucero will be charged to Personnel. Now, what else do you need?"

"That will do it," Prosser said. I could see that both he and Lucero were anxious to get back to the charts and graphs on the desk.

"How many people did you run through your test booth when the project was unapproved?" I asked.

Prosser grinned. "About everyone I could lure into it on their lunch hour, or after work. Twenty, I suppose. It didn't take more than ten minutes, once you got the subject in the booth."

"Yes, I know." I'd taken the test. It was easily done. You sat in a darkened glass booth, while the machines bombarded you with sheathed rays. Questions were flashed on a wall before you. You didn't answer them but of course you reacted to them, and Prosser's CF recorder picked up the reactions on tape. In its concept the test went far beyond simple lie detection apparatus. "What did you do with those first tapes?"

Prosser answered carefully.

"Some of them are still in our files. Some we threw away. Many of the questions were faulty, I'm sure, and I know that my evaluation of the reactions was not scientifically sound. That's why I needed a psychiatrist."

"Did Brandt take the test?"

"Yes, he did." Prosser picked up a chart and frowned at it. "Like all the other tests, the results were inconclusive."

I kept staring at him until he met my look. "The premise is sound, Tom, but we need to do a lot of work before we can be sure of our evaluations."

"You two have got it." I turned away, and when I looked back from the first laboratory, Prosser and Lucero were already working again. The one thing that stuck in my mind from the CF test I had taken was the statement that I was cautious in making decisions. That was a laugh.

The full impact of what I was getting into with Tracy's "program" didn't strike me until I was on my way that evening to pick Connie up for dinner. Anyway you tried to justify the plan it was still murder on a wide scale.

I went over Brandt's arguments, which I had scarcely questioned when he was stating them. Now, without his presence, they seemed to have lost much of their logic and force.

After I picked up Connie, we

started toward the quiet little restaurant on Olympic where we usually ate. We had gone several blocks when I realized suddenly that she was waiting for an answer to some questions she had asked. "I'm sorry. What did you say, Connie?"

"Nothing important. What's the matter—too much Brandt today?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing in particular."

"You said it. What *did* you mean?"

"Nothing!"

"The hell you didn't. I get a little tired, you know, of people always needling me about Brandt, as if I were some parasite hanging on his coattail."

"That's the way it seems," she said coolly.

I turned into a side street and parked. "Let's get this on the line."

"Let's do, but spare me any more of Marcus Brandt's favorite statements. Sometimes I can't tell whether I'm talking to him or you."

"So you don't like Brandt? A lot of people—"

"I don't like you in his image! You talk like Marcus Brandt. You dress like him. Sometimes I think you spend your spare time studying his directives so you can think like him. I'm beginning to wonder if you ever did have a mind of your own, or does he hypnotize you in those little conferences. "Thomas, come here!"

"Who started that—Prosser?"

"No! It's all over the factory. I

even heard one of the gardeners yelling it at an assistant."

There was always petty jealousy; I had learned to disregard it. "What brought this on, Connie?"

"It's been growing in my mind since the first time we went out together. I kept thinking I was wrong, but—"

"You are wrong. Brandt's been like a father to me since I was a kid. I owe my whole career to him, but he's never so much as suggested that. I've tried to repay him by—"

"Doing his dirty work. You've told me all about that proxy fight. If you owed him anything, you more than repaid it then. What are you going to do, spend your whole life being the exact shadow of Marcus Brandt, moving when he moves, jumping when he jumps?"

"It's not been like that, Connie."

She gave me a searching look. "Take me home."

"That's silly. We've had a little disagreement." I started the car. "We'll go on to the restaurant and talk this over quietly."

"Put it on the line, huh? Well, it has been put on the line. Take me home, please."

"I'll drive around a little, until you cool off."

When I stopped at the boulevard, she jumped out and ran toward a telephone booth.

"Connie!"

She wouldn't listen. Well, let her go home in a cab. Tomorrow she'd be more sensible.

I went on to the restaurant, but when I got there, the thought of going inside alone was no good. After a few moments in the parking lot, I pulled out, driving aimlessly. For one of the few times in my life I thought of taking a couple of drinks, but the memory of my father killed that idea quickly.

Connie was the only woman I'd ever thought of marrying, but I'd never been even close to asking her. She and Brandt were the only people I'd ever trusted enough to talk to freely, and now, when I felt a desperate need for someone's confidence, I couldn't talk to either of them.

As a kid I thought I had been alone in a hostile world, but now I really knew the depths of loneliness.

If I lost Connie for good . . . But I couldn't allow the thought; somehow I would smooth things out. All the way to Santa Monica I kept telling myself that I wouldn't lose her, that she was wrong about Brandt, that she would understand my side of the argument when we had a chance to talk quietly.

Her accusations had opened a whole field of speculation about myself that left me shaken and afraid. And like a black shadow riding beside me was the "program." How had I accepted that so readily from Brandt, unless Connie's criticism was true? The whole proposal was monstrous.

By the time I turned back from Santa Monica, I had resolved to

take the first big step to straighten out my problems. In the morning I would tell Brandt that I wouldn't be a part of the "program." After that, I would work out the difficulties with Connie.

Decision is supposed to be the first step toward relieving fear, but it didn't help me. The black shadow still rode beside me and it followed me to my apartment, and it waited beside me when I tried to sleep.

Through a drizzling rain I went straight from the parking lot to Brandt's office the next morning. Maggie Burke eyed me cheerfully. "You *are* early this morning, Mr. Milstead, but go right in. Mr. Brandt is expecting you."

Nothing about him was changed. He was still the same calm, almost grandfatherly man I had known more than half my life. "Good morning, Thomas. Sit down."

Just seeing Brandt made me feel that everything would work out all right.

"First things first," he said smiling. "You've had a night to think things over, and so some doubts have raised in your mind. Right?"

"Yes."

"Ethical or organizational, Thomas?"

"Moral."

"Ah, yes! That is a much maligned word these days. We are about to eliminate scum from society, and you question the moral

worth of such action." Brandt eyed me like a gentle teacher.

"We have no right—"

He stopped me by raising his hand. "We have no right to do anything in this world, except the rights which we create for the good of all. Our plan surely *is* for the good of all. To begin, we are going to eliminate all the leaders in the most despicable field of crime that exists, the traffic in narcotics."

I stared at him.

"I don't need to tell you of the degradation and misery created by the men who control that project, do I, Thomas? The mad dog in the street deserves better than they."

"Anyone would agree with that, but—"

"The time is past for doubts. If I had held any doubts about you, do you think I would have told you about the plan yesterday?" Brandt's face was like a death mask with a smile on its lips. Slowly he took from his breast pocket a folded memo sheet and passed it across to me.

In his own writing were six names, none of them familiar to me.

"Area 1, Southern California," Brandt said, as I continued to look at the memo. To me, the names did not represent men, but merely symbols. "You've memorized them well?"

I nodded and pushed the paper back. Brandt burned it in an ash-tray, watching me across the flames. He stirred the ashes with a pen.

"There will be a team of two for each assignment. That will be the pattern in all the areas. Our field men are already selected, except for three area chiefs whom we'll choose in the next few days.

"Your job will be to coordinate the final plans in all the areas, so that the entire project can be completed within one hour. That poses problems, I'll admit, but nothing that can't be overcome by precise planning. Consider this as a business operation, Thomas, and in that light I'm sure you can rid yourself of the last bit of reluctance that I seem to detect in you. We're dealing with human life, yes, but in one of its very lowest forms, with only an outward resemblance to the good citizens of this world."

I had come to rebel, but now, under Brandt's spell, with the habits of years influencing my thinking, it was not difficult to accept the whole project as another brilliantly conceived Brandt plan. That it had been Charlie Tracy's idea originally meant nothing to either of us; he was only a tool to be thrown in the salvage bin when the time came.

Brandt was smiling. "I see the old fire rising in you, Thomas. It warms my heart. Now, let's get the details on the line."

Perhaps Connie was right, I thought; maybe I had worked day and night to mould myself in Brandt's image. Now I was proud of the fact. Brandt put the first stage of the details on the line.

For just a moment after I left his office and started toward Research, I had a twinge of misgiving, an impulse to go talk to Connie about last night, but I went on toward Research.

Connie was an uncertainty. Brandt was solid and sure.

During the following three weeks Prosser became increasingly optimistic over progress in CF. Lucero redrafted the questions and the system of evaluating reactions. Both he and Prosser were pleased with the direction of their experiment, but they warned me that it would take months; or perhaps years, to bring the project to the point where they would dare certify reasonable accuracy of findings in all cases.

They were scientists. Brandt and I were practical men demanding quick results.

"There must be some basic human qualities which you can measure in each subject you test," I insisted one day.

"Stupidity in some degree," Lucero said. "We find that fairly constant in all cases, even among those of high intelligence."

"How about loyalty?" I asked.

Lucero looked pained. "In time, I suppose by using a special battery of questions restricted to a very limited area, we could measure abstractions like that."

"Suppose a man had no moral conscience. Could you determine that with your present experience?"

Prosser gave me a sharp look, and then glanced away quickly.

"I rather think that would involve measuring several different traits," Lucero answered. "As Carl no doubt has explained to you, an indication of a subject's lack of moral conscience might be shown in the reactions as we're now able to interpret them, but—" He glanced at Prosser and stopped. Prosser was disturbed and angry. "The project is experimental. Nothing conclusive can be said about it yet."

"Let's get conclusive about this particular aspect of character," I said. "In six days we're going to start a new hiring program. We'll give every prospective employee a CF test."

Prosser waved his hands in disgust. "No, no! We're months away from even considering anything like that."

"Lucero just said that CF, right now, would indicate whether or not a man had a moral conscience," I insisted. "What better guide to hiring could we have than that?"

Prosser shook his head. "We would make incredible errors. We have thousands of reaction patterns to chart and interpret before we begin to approach accuracy. This is painstaking work, Tom. It can't be played with like a new toy. Why, right now if a subject mentally answers the questions too quickly, we get a tape that's completely confusing. In time, we can find . . ."

"Time, that's all you guys talk of." I hated this business of brow-beating research men, but I'd been doing it for years. I looked at Lucero. "You could set up a battery of questions to determine what I asked for, couldn't you?"

"Yes, I suppose so," Lucero said reluctantly, after Prosser gave him no help. "But, as Carl said, our measurements would be indicative only."

"Start on it now," I said, and walked out.

Prosser caught up with me at the doorway of Design. He motioned me down the hall several steps. "Look, Tom, so I made the mistake of telling Brandt that the test indicated he had no moral conscience, but I did it in a joking manner, and I also emphasized that CF was experimental."

"I know all that," I lied.

"And you don't believe it, any more than I do, so why are you pushing the point? Brandt took it all right. He laughed about it and said—"

"Why are you so agitated about it then?"

"I don't want to be forced off the line of procedure we're trying to work out, simply because I was honest enough to tell Brandt what the test seemed to indicate about him."

"There's nothing personal in this, Carl." I paused. "You believe what the test said about Brandt, don't you?"

"My attitude toward CF is prejudiced. After we've worked it out thoroughly—"

"You believe what CF indicated about Brandt, don't you?"

"Yes, damn it!" Prosser shook his head. "But if I hadn't told Brandt, he wouldn't be disrupting our line of procedure now."

"Carry it out. You can get back to developing it the way you want to later." I watched Prosser walk away, and I wondered how a brilliant research man could stomach some of the things he had to put up with in industry.

Now the black shadow was with me again. Brandt hadn't told me about the results of his CF test. He agreed with what it had revealed of his character, or he would not have given me orders to direct CF specifically toward finding men with lack of moral conscience. I knew how we were going to use those men.

Both CF and the "program" frightened me. I thought of heading straight to Brandt and telling him that I could go no farther. But I lacked either the courage or a genuine desire to make the break.

I didn't go to see Brandt then. I went, instead, to see Connie, but when I was standing by her desk, I found that I had nothing to say about the main problem.

She appeared more desirable than ever, and she was even cordial, but behind that I saw the solid face of our argument in the car.

"You don't look like you've been getting much sleep, Tom. Are you feeling all right?"

"Of course. I've been working late, that's all." Working late learning everything I could about CF, pounding at Production for the rush assembly of a small, portable unit of the ray projector. "How about dinner tonight."

"No, Tom."

"Ever again?"

"That depends on you."

Personnel interviewed 167 men and 42 women for various jobs. All the applicants took the CF test, and a good many of them came out of the booth angry. One man said, "What the hell do you mean asking crazy stuff like did I feel sorry when I hurt a bird or small animal when I was a kid, or would I torture my sister if I knew she had a lot of money hid and I wanted it? What's that stuff got to do with asking for a job as a guard?"

I let Prosser and Lucero answer such questions. In going over the tapes with the two of them, we found six cases that I concentrated on. Lucero ruled two of them out as inconclusive on the grounds of a probable lack of experiencing the acts set forth in the questions.

"Here's one I wouldn't want to meet in a dark alley," Lucero said, handing me a tape that showed an almost level graph line, indicating a total lack of guilt or even agitation in the subject's reaction to the

questions. "I'd like to make a case study of that fellow in a clinic."

I took the six tapes, telling Prosser that I would warn Personnel. When I checked the numbers against the names, the subject whom Lucero had commented so strongly on turned out to be a woman, 42, divorced, a secretary with an excellent employment record.

Brandt studied the four names and addresses I gave him. "A woman? Why not, Thomas?" He put the paper in his pocket.

"Who talks to these people?" I asked. "The idea of selecting key men at random, even with the aid of CF, and then expecting them to fit the bill is not very sound."

"There was preliminary screening. Don't worry about Tracy's expediters. Now, for the next step . . ."

I left Brandt's office with an uneasy feeling; he'd never been secretive with me about other projects. That night I saw a picture of Charlie Tracy in the society section of a newspaper. He was sunning himself in Hawaii with some well known politicians.

I wondered if his appetite had become as poor as mine had been lately.

The next evening I called Pete Gilford, a lieutenant of detectives I knew, and asked him if he would check on a Frances Casp for me as a personal favor. He called back about an hour later.

"Your girl friend is in the files, sure enough. Married twice. She was checked out after her first husband died. Suspicion of murder. Not enough hard evidence to file any charges. About three years later she worked for a guy who embezzled fifty thousand. He shot himself. It looked like she got most of the money, but nobody proved that either. You going steady with her now?"

"We have her application for employment."

"That's your problem."

"Thanks, Pete." Of the 209 people we had run through CF, I wondered how many had been hand picked in advance by Tracy's expe-diters.

My coordinating work began the next evening. I didn't know who had arranged the details. Brandt gave me the name of an old downtown hotel and the schedule I was to follow in meeting three people. Frances Casp—I'm sure it was she—was the first.

We talked in a darkened room and I never had a good look at her. She was a heavy woman, with a pleasant, deep voice. I kept thinking she'd scare off as I explained the details of her job as coldbloodedly as I possibly could.

"Do you know any of the men?" I asked.

"I've heard of three of them."

"Can you recruit the labor you'll need?"

She was only a dark form across

the room from me. "I've got six of them in mind right now. Who handles the payments for labor?"

"You do."

"Any objections to poison?"

"No." I was pretty sure about how her husband had died.

We discussed the work thoroughly. It was to begin at 4:00 p.m., Eastern Standard Time, sixteen days away. I explained that there would be no more conferences. When she quit asking questions, I said, "You understand everything?"

"I do," she answered quietly.

"Who—how did you get sold on this?"

"Money. Just like you were sold, Mr. Fetters."

Her use of the fictitious name I had registered under rather bothered me.

"I'll go now," she said.

I stepped back in the bathroom and shut the door while she was leaving. I wasn't even tempted to cheat and see what the weak hall light would show of her.

In two other cheap hotels that night I interviewed an area manager for Denver and one for New Orleans. They asked more questions and had more worries than the woman. One of them wanted to bargain for higher pay and I had to cut him down curtly. The deals were made. I gave them plane tickets to go to their areas.

When the last one had gone, I sat down dead tired. My hands were shaking.

Two days later Charlie Tracy came booming back from Hawaii, more tanned than ever and full of life. He was nettled when I begged off from going out to the Hidalgo with him and Brandt to let him win back his five dollars.

They had a fine time breaking clay pigeons, and they came back laughing about how badly Brandt had done. The next afternoon Tracy took a jet home to Philadelphia.

After a final, thorough briefing from Brandt, which took two hours, I went on the road to interview the four area managers I had not seen. My name was William Gordon. The route, the meeting places, and the schedule was all set. I memorized the details.

St. Louis was the first stop. The CF unit I picked up at an express office looked like a salesman's sample case. In a third-rate hotel I repeated the routine of conferring with the area manager in the dark. The only difficulty I had was in convincing him that he must take the CF test.

"We made a mistake once in judging a man," Brandt had told me just before I left Los Angeles, "but we won't do it again."

"Suppose some of the area managers don't qualify?"

"Then we'll postpone action in their area."

The portable unit was a tribute to Prosser's skill. All one had to do was to plug it in. With a remote

control unit that started and stopped the tape and questions simultaneously it was possible to sit well away from the subject to avoid distracting him, while the darkness of the room served the purpose of an isolation booth. The questions ran through in small print under murky blue light.

"Just think each question over slowly," I said.

I took the tape into the bathroom and closed the door and turned on the light. The St. Louis area manager would do; his graph was almost like Frances Casp's.

The Chicago man had the same void as the others, and there my hope began to fade that the CF unit would turn up results that would make it necessary to call off the "program" in some areas.

Maybe the damn thing was a fake or out of order. When I got to New York, I took the test myself. The graph line showed a wild upsurge on every question, and I didn't know how to interpret it.

It was all I could do to bring my mind to attention during the conference with the New York area manager the following evening. I was tired and my nerves were jumpy and my thoughts kept straying while he outlined his ideas after I had explained what his duties were. In no case had any of the managers known why they had been hired.

The CF unit showed the New York man to be as void of moral

conscience as all the rest. Someone had chosen those men with fiendish skill.

"I had a feeling there would be some fancy work involved when your friend looked me up and made the down payment," the man said. "I already know who to hire."

"My friend?"

"Jones."

"Oh, yes."

The man laughed. "Any bonus if we deal with a few customers that aren't on the list you quoted?"

"Stick to the list."

"We may have to handle them later, after we've moved in and they try to push us out."

"Who said we were going to move in?" I asked.

"I gathered the idea from Jones." The man rose. He was small and quick of movement and that was all I knew of him, aside from his record on CF. "Nothing more?"

"That's all."

Philadelphia was the last call. I was to go down there in the morning. Three sleeping pills didn't help at all. I felt worse in the morning than I had the night before. My stomach was in knots and there was a dull pain in my left arm that seemed to grow worse during the train ride to Philadelphia.

The cab driver asked, "Where to, mister?"

The name of the hotel was on the tip of my tongue, and then suddenly I couldn't remember it. I was panicky for a moment.

"Where you wanta go, mister?"

"I haven't made up my mind. Just keep driving."

The panic returned. I couldn't think of the name of the hotel. There was someone in Los Angeles who could tell me, but I couldn't remember his name.

After about ten blocks the cab driver said, "I got all day, if you got the price."

"Take me to a good hotel." I'd rest a while and then I would be all right.

The cabbie chose a very good hotel. I lay down but I still couldn't rest. Then I remembered Brandt's name. He had given me orders not to call him under any circumstances, but I had to in order to find out where I was to meet the area manager.

I picked up the phone. The name had slipped out of my memory again. I had the terrible feeling that I was going mad, that I would start screaming wildly in a moment. But my voice sounded steady enough a few moments later when I called the desk and asked for the hotel doctor.

He was a young man with a neat, reddish mustache and thinning hair. "Well, Mr. Milstead, what seems to be your trouble?"

So I had registered under my real name, I thought. "I haven't been sleeping well and I feel like I've got a fever."

"Just lie down there and let's find out."

He was thorough enough, it seemed. He took about ten minutes to examine me. "You haven't any fever. Your heart is a trifle fast but it's nothing to be concerned about. When did you last get a good night's sleep?"

"It's been quite a while, several days at least."

"I'll give you a shot to relax you, and then some capsules you can take later."

"I don't want to be knocked out, Doctor. I've got an important appointment—"

"Sure, sure, every salesman in the country has." He gave me an injection, some sage advice about slowing down, and then he left, saying he would check on me in the morning.

The shot did relax me and I could have slept if I hadn't been driven by the fact that I didn't know where to go to keep the appointment with the area manager. No matter how I tried to force my mind, I could not recall the name of the hotel, and I couldn't remember the name of the man in Los Angeles who had the information.

No one else knew, except the shadowy man known as Jones, and perhaps only Charlie Tracy knew who he was.

Charlie Tracy!

He lived in Philadelphia, and he was home.

It was a long cab ride to the exclusive suburb where Tracy lived. The house was a beautiful structure

with the look of Colonial times, but I never saw the inside of it.

Tracy was just starting somewhere in a black and white sports car when the cab pulled in beside him. "Wait," I told the driver and jumped out.

"Milstead! What the hell are you doing here?"

I hadn't expected him to be glad to see me. I got in beside him, feeling a shortness of breath that had been bothering me for a week or more.

"There's been a foul-up on my meeting with the area manager here, Charlie. I think I've been given the name of the wrong hotel."

Tracy stared at me, puzzled. "Say that again."

I repeated the problem. Tracy shook his head. "I don't know what you're talking about. What are you doing in Philadelphia anyway?"

"I've checked out all the area managers except here, and now I don't know where to meet him. If you want to skip Philadelphia, I don't care, but if—"

"If I didn't know you better, I'd say you've been on a two-weeks drunk, Milstead. You're not confusing Philadelphia with Pittsburgh, are you? We don't even have an office here—But if we did, what the hell would you be doing here anyway on company business?"

He was a good actor.

"All right," I said, "we'll skip this area." I started to get out of the car.

He caught my arm. "Are you all right, Milstead?"

"There's nothing wrong with me, except that I've knocked myself out coordinating your damned "program."

"My program?" Tracy kept staring at me. "I think you need a doctor."

"Thanks, I just saw one." I jerked away from him and walked back to the cab.

"Does Brandt know you're here?" he called.

"Yes, Brandt, Tracy and Jones!"

He was still sitting in the sports car with a bewildered look when I told the cab driver to take me back to the hotel.

"Which one?" he asked.

"Where you picked me up."

"You got in at my stand. Which hotel do you want to go to?"

I couldn't remember. "Take me back to your stand."

The hotel was two blocks from where the cabbie let me out. That I found it at all seemed to me to be a major accomplishment. I took all the capsules the doctor had left and then I got into bed.

For the first time in weeks I slept soundly, waking in the morning with a horrible taste in my mouth. My brain was functioning clearly again and I could remember every fact I tried to recall, including the name and address of the hotel where I had missed an appointment the night before, but, still distrustful, I wrote down those details

which had eluded me previously.

The young doctor came in while I was dressing.

"Ah! You look better this morning."

"I feel better. I got some sleep."

"Good." He took a stethoscope from his bag. "Let's hear that heart again, Mr. Milstead." After a few moments of listening to my heart beat, he smiled. "The sleep must have done it."

I buttoned my shirt. "What makes a person suddenly forget a completely familiar detail, Doctor, like, say, the name and address of a friend?"

The doctor shrugged. "Shock. Sometimes highly intelligent people worry too much and find themselves forgetting the simplest things. In extreme cases, the mind will block out an offensive fact. There are lots of reasons for memory lapses. Old age is one." He grinned. "What did you do, forget a big buyer's first name?"

"Something like that."

"Don't let it worry you." The doctor went out.

I had breakfast in the room, and then I sat there thinking about my conversation with Tracy. Some aspects of the incidents were clearer now than they had been at the time. If he hadn't been bewildered by my questions, he certainly had done a wonderful job of pretending. Why should he pretend ignorance of the "program" to me, especially at a time when part of the project was

in jeopardy and I needed help to pull it out.

I had only Brandt's word that Tracy was in the thing at all. Only Brandt's word . . . Only Brandt

...

Two nights before the New York area manager had mentioned a take-over. If he knew what he was talking about, then I had been given facts on only one half of the project. The second half . . . O Christ!

Marcus Brandt wouldn't do that to me.

Across the room, the sleek new case that held the CF unit shouted a denial of my denial.

Not Brandt, not Brandt, I keep telling myself.

But he wasn't there to put his fatherly gaze on me, to direct my line of thinking, to talk me out of my suspicions with calm words.

For the past thirteen days I had been working like an unthinking machine to set up the murder of thirty-seven men. In three days the purge would start. Not names, not figures on a sheet, not units in a smoothly organized plan—but men.

What kind of man was I? Slow to make decisions, the CF unit had said. How did it know, I thought bitterly. I'd never made a big decision of my own; for eighteen years they had all been fed to me.

Now I had to make a decision.

For three hours I tried to figure how to stop the whole thing. There was no way to get in touch with the area managers. I didn't even know

who they were, except Frances Casp, and I could be mistaken about her. Going to the police was out of the question; my story was too fantastic. Quite likely they would refer me to a doctor for psychiatric examination.

Only Marcus Brandt could call it off.

It was late that night before I got a plane for Los Angeles. Bad weather grounded us for twelve hours in Chicago, and for a while it appeared that we would be there even longer.

Two days left, beginning at 4:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time.

The time seemed too short. I was only hours from Los Angeles, but even if the weather cleared, the plane might be grounded again. It could develop engine trouble. In desperation, I thought of calling Brandt and telling him that CF had shown all four of the area managers I had tested unfit for their work.

But even if he fell for that and called the operation off in four cities, it will still go on in three. And then the chilling thought came to me that he wouldn't call any part of the "program" off. CF had been only a means of confirming his own opinion.

I went back to the desk. "What's the weather picture now?"

"Still uncertain, sir, for western flights."

"How about a charter, some private line?"

"I couldn't say, but I don't think

you'd find any reliable service that would put a plane up in this weather."

I decided to wait two hours before trying to find some unreliable flying service. Ninety-three minutes later it was announced that my flight would go in an hour.

It was two and a half hours later before we took off. In Denver there was another delay because of weather. I fought every mile of the way to help get the plane through to Los Angeles, and when I walked out into the rain at International, the urgency was still driving me, although there were still twenty-four hours left before the deadline.

Now there was the problem of handling Brandt, and I wasn't sure that I could do it.

From the airport I called Pete Gilford, the detective lieutenant. "This is a big favor I really need, Pete," and I told him what I wanted.

"You and that old gal, brother! Do you know I could get in a jam over a thing like that?"

"You won't, believe me."

I talked him into it.

For the second time in my life I walked into Marcus Brandt's office without being announced. He barely glanced at me and then went right on signing letters.

"Marc—"

He cut me off without looking at me, without doing anything but being Marcus Brandt. I sat down.

When he finished his chore, he

looked at me thoughtfully. "Tracy called me. He said you were a wild man, Thomas. How much did you tell him?"

"Nothing, actually. Don't tell me that he was acting."

"Why, of course not." Brandt looked at the tip of his desk pen. "That's beginning to scratch a little." He put it back in the holder. "I would have told you the truth about Tracy, at the right time."

"The right time for that, and everything else, is past."

Brandt stared at me for a long time. He smiled slowly. "You have been under a strain, haven't you?"

"You bet I have—for eighteen lousy years."

Brandt was still smiling. "And now you're going to tell me that you're pulling away, that a great light has struck you suddenly, that I'm an evil old man who has used you to do his dirty work. That's all foaming up in you now, isn't it?"

I was afraid of him, afraid of his influence over my thinking. "That's exactly right!" I said, much louder than I had intended to speak.

"You feel that you must do something. Put it on the line, Thomas."

"You're going to call the whole thing off."

"I am?" he said gently. "You made all the arrangements, except for your small failure in Philadelphia. Why don't *you* call it off?"

"Yes, you are," I said. "You know every one of those men. You picked them yourself and sent them from

Los Angeles. Tracy's expediters! There never was a go-between, except me."

"Please don't hammer at facts we both know." Brandt might have been reprimanding me for over-emphasizing points in a discussion of plant policy. He rose and came over to me and put his hand on my shoulder. "I see now that I should have told you everything in advance, as I always have, but you had a hard task to perform as it was, without being over-burdened with more details."

"My being overburdened with work has never worried you before."

"I haven't used you, Thomas. I've *trained* you." Brandt said it with such quiet intensity that I had to believe him.

"Trained me for what—wholesale murder?"

"It surprises me that you look at it that way. I don't." On his way back to his desk Brandt paused and ran his hand slowly across his eyes. He gave his head a tiny shake and sat down. "I just don't consider it in that light, and I don't think you do either."

"It surprises you that I think murder is murder, no matter who the rats are that are getting it?"

Brandt nodded. "Yes, Thomas, it certainly does surprise me."

"And you actually thought I'd go along with your plan to take over the narcotics business of this country?"

"Where did you get that idea?"

"What's the difference? It's so, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's true. In spite of strong personal reasons you have against such an operation, I think I can convince you that it's a sound move for us."

He believed that, he really did. His hold on me had been so strong that he was sure he could lead me to any depths. A horrible thought hit me: he might be right even now. As he sat there looking at me with a puzzled expression, I felt an urge to leap up and run from the room.

"Call it off, Marc." My voice shook a little.

"It's too late."

"No, it isn't. You've never let a big deal go through without last-minute confirmation. Wire those area men that the operation is dead."

Brandt pulled the middle drawer of his desk open. "It's too late for you, too, Thomas."

I was too far away from him to do anything, except to surge up.

"Read it." Brandt withdrew a heavy envelope from the drawer and tossed it on his desk.

I let out a long breath as I went over to pick up the envelope. Inside it was Brandt's will. It named me as the sole beneficiary to an estate of one half million dollars.

"Tear it up, Thomas."

I ripped the papers to pieces and let them fall on his desk. Brandt watched with no expression, and

then he spoke as a man rebuking himself. "You are the biggest error I ever made. Tracy was a mere oversight, but I had the best part of your lifetime to base my judgment—and I made a mistake."

He wiped his hands across his eyes again, with his head lowered, and then he looked up at me with an expression of appeal that I had never seen before. "Didn't I?"

"Yes, Marc, you did make a mistake." I was sure now where I hadn't been sure before. "Call the "program" off."

"I took in a scared kid," Brandt mused. "I trained him for eighteen years and he became a weak man." His expression changed to hard shrewdness. "No, I won't call the project off. You're an enemy now. Why don't you take your story to the police?"

I went back to my chair and sat down, and I was thankful that Brandt had taught me how to hold a poker face. "I already have been to the police, Marc. Federal narcotics men know the whole story. And the FBI."

Brandt smiled. "Then why insist that I call the operation off?"

"Because I still don't know who the Philadelphia man is, but believe me I took precautions to find out who I was dealing with in every other instance. Your money came in very handy to hire my own little group of investigators in every city, and at the end I turned the dope over to the federal people.

"I'm sorry but I was never with you from the first, and the only way I could stop it was to do just what I did. There's a chance that the federal men may miss one of the area supervisors, besides the one in Philadelphia, so that's why I'm asking you to cancel it."

"I think you're lying, Thomas."

We tried to stare each other down. I might have lost if Maggie hadn't buzzed.

"I'm busy," Brandt said.

"He insists, Mr. Brandt. It's a police lieutenant."

"What's his name?"

"Lt. Peter F. Gilford, detective bureau."

Brandt gave me a narrow look. "Put him on, Maggie."

I saw Brandt's face begin to sag as he listened to Pete Gilford. "No, Lieutenant, I won't go bail. I never heard of her." He put the phone down.

"Thomas, are you trying a cheap trick?"

"A "her," was it? That would be Frances Casp, the lady poisoner. You may have six more pointing a finger at you before it's over. Shall we sit here and see?"

Again Brandt ran his hand over his eyes. His whole arm was trembling. He was a breaking man when he looked at me again. "So you *did* do it? My God, Thomas, you did this to me?"

"Call it off."

I wrote down the names and addresses he dictated. The message

was "Withdraw all bids until further Notice," and it was signed Jones Construction Co.

Brandt's mind seemed to be as keen as ever while he was giving me the information. I was turning to leave when I heard him gasp. His face suddenly was not Marcus Brandt's. One whole side of it drooped and the eye went wild. And then he slumped across his desk, with his hands knocking aside the litter of the torn-up will.

Later, a series of strokes in the hospital culminated in a final one.

The doctors said that the first

stroke could have happened anytime under any circumstances, but I knew that I had triggered it when I convinced him finally, not that the "program" was destroyed, but that he had failed to build another man's life exactly in the image of his own.

I cried for Marcus Brandt; he had been my father.

After I helped the first aid men carry him on the stretcher to the ambulance that gleamed so whitely in the drizzling rain, I sent the telegrams. And then I went to tell Connie the full story.



MANHUNT

Subscribe Today

MONEY-SAVING RATES

First Subscription (12 Issues) \$4.00. (24 Issues) \$7.50
Two Subscriptions (12 Issues) \$7.50. (24 Issues) \$14.00
Each additional 12 Issues Subscription, \$3.00; 24 Issues, \$6.00
Add \$1.00 for subscriptions mailed outside the United States.



*Mail this order form with your check or money order made out to:
Flying Eagle Publications, 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y.*

Send MANHUNT regularly for { 24 Issues 6/6
 12 Issues (Check which)

TO

Address

.....



*Mail this order form with your check or money order made out to:
Flying Eagle Publications, 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y.*

Send MANHUNT regularly for { 24 Issues 6/6
 12 Issues (Check which)

TO

Address

.....

Toot

We're tooting our own horn over the latest issue of Nugget. For toots: "Clumping in Soho," a photo story on a crazy Eros with words by Gregory Corso. Then Kenneth Rexroth tells what's cool in S.F. And Nelson Algren tells what's uncool in Istanbul. On hand with humor: Wolf Mankowitz and Terry Southern. For Special delights buy the June issue. Then you too will be a tooter. So toot to your newsstand today.

