MANHUNT

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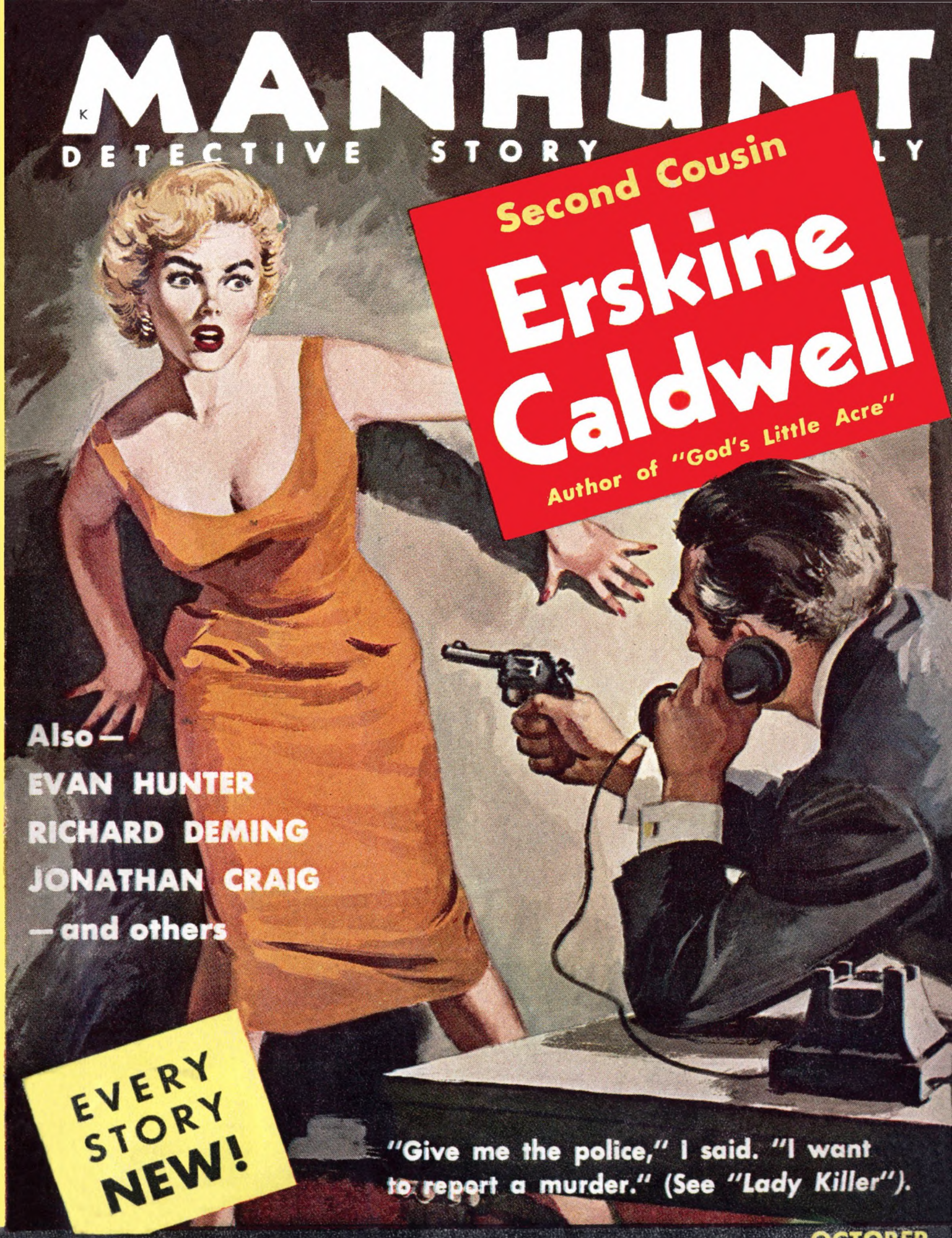

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"Give me the police," I said. "I want to report a murder." (See "Lady Killer").

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OCTOBER

VOL. 2, NO. 8

MANHUNT

OCTOBER, 1954

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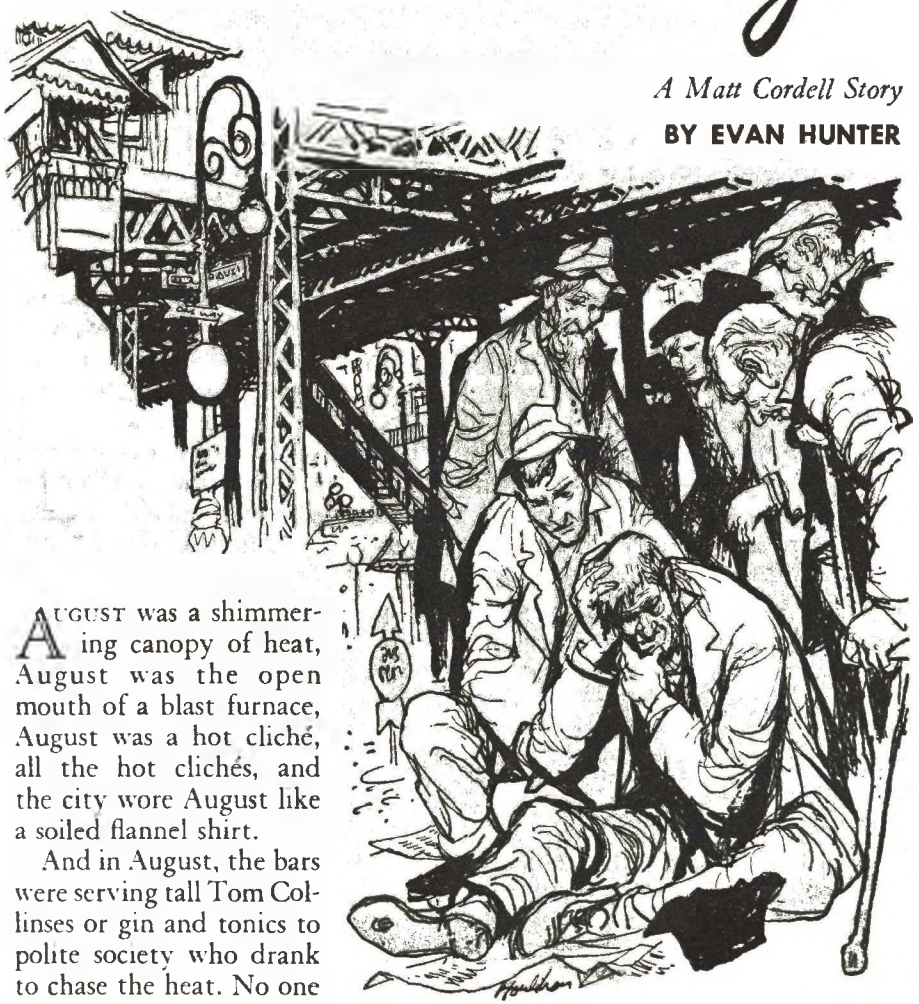
MANHUNT VOLUME 2, NUMBER 8, OCTOBER, 1954. Single copies 35 cents. Subscriptions, $4.00 for one year in the United States and Possessions; elsewhere $5.00 (in U. S. funds) for one year. Published monthly by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc., 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. Telephone MU 7-6623. Application for second class entry is pending at the Post Office, New York, N. Y.

Cordell couldn't figure it out. Who'd want to beat up six Bowery bums?

The Beatings

A Matt Cordell Story

BY EVAN HUNTER



AUGUST was a shimmering canopy of heat, August was the open mouth of a blast furnace, August was a hot cliché, all the hot clichés, and the city wore August like a soiled flannel shirt.

And in August, the bars were serving tall Tom Collinses or gin and tonics to polite society who drank to chase the heat. No one

on the Bowery drank to chase the heat. Winter and Summer were twin seasons on the Bowery, merged together in a heavy fog of persistent memories. You drank to squash the memories, but the drink only strengthened them.

And in the brotherhood of wine, you somehow began to feel a sense of real brotherhood. Everything else was gone then. Your Trina was gone, and your agency was gone, and your life was gone, all poured down the sink like a bottle of sour wine. The others had nothing, too. The others were only faces at first, but the faces began to take on a meaning after a while, the members of your exclusive fraternity, the cast of the living dead. These were your brothers. Louse-infected, bearded, rumpled, sweating, empty hulks of men, they were nonetheless your brothers. The world above 14th Street was a fantasy. The Bowery was your life, and its inhabitants were your friends and neighbors.

If your name is Matt Cordell, there's something inside you that makes you a part of your friends and neighbors.

My name is Matt Cordell.

My friend and neighbor owned a very bloody face. My friend and neighbor was called Angelo, and he tried to talk but his lips were puffed and bleeding, and the teeth in the front of his mouth had been knocked out. He had never looked pretty, Angelo, but his face was almost unrecognizable now, and the words that trailed from his ruptured mouth were indistinct and blurred.

"Who did it?" I asked. I was only another face in the ring of faces surrounding Angelo. The faces were immersed in an alcoholic haze, but the sight of Angelo was evaporating the stupor. We crowded around him like bettors in a floating crap game. He shook his head and drops of blood splashed to the sidewalk.

"Don't know," he mumbled. "Didn't see. Couldn't . . ."

"What do you mean, you don't know?" Danny asked. Danny was tall and thin, a wino who'd been on the Bowery for as long as I could remember. The rumble had it that Danny used to be a professor of history in a swank upstate girl's college until he'd got into some kind of trouble. Danny did not like violence. His dislike showed in the sharp angle of his shaggy brows, the tight line of his mouth.

"Didn't see who," Angelo mumbled. He shook his head. "Just like that. Fast."

"Were you carrying money?" I asked.

Angelo tried to smile, but his broken mouth wouldn't let him. "Money? Me? No, Matt. No money."

"A jug, then? Did you have a jug on you?"

"No."

"Then why would anyone . . ." Danny started.

"I don't know," Angelo said, puz-

zled. "I got hit on the back of the head, and then I was down . . ."

"Like what happened to Fritzie," Farvo said. Farvo was a fat man who blinked a lot. He blinked because he was trying to shut out the sight of a wife who'd shot herself in the head while he watched. We all knew why he blinked and so we never mentioned it. Men can become good neighbors when their common mortar is despair.

"And Diego got it like that too," Marty said. "Just like that, with nobody around. It's crazy, that's all."

"Do you think the cops, maybe?" Danny asked.

"No," I said.

"Why not?"

"Why should it be the cops? They've got no reason for wholesale beatings. This is about the sixth guy in two weeks."

"The cops are good at this kind of thing," Farvo said, blinking.

"Only when they've got a reason."

"Cops don't need no reason," Marty said.

No one answered him. We got Angelo to his feet, and we took him to the Professor. The Professor had once been a chemist, until he began sampling the drugs he'd handled. He still knew how to dress a cut. He'd helped me once, and he helped Angelo now, and when he was through with his bandages, he asked, "What are we going to do, Matt?"

"I don't know," I said.

"This is a community, you know," he said. "It may be the world's worst community, and maybe its citizens are all pigs, but that's no reason to turn it into a slaughter house."

"No," I said.

"You ever run into anything like this before? You used to run a detective agency. Did you ever . . ."

"No, nothing exactly like it," I said.

"So what are we going to do?"

"Keep our eyes open," I said. "We'll find whoever's responsible."

"You think he'd leave us alone," the Professor said sadly. "You'd think we got enough troubles."

"Yeah," I said.

Our troubles got bigger. Farvo turned up the next night. Farvo wasn't blinking, and he'd never blink again. Farvo had been beaten to death.

There had been a beating a long, long time ago. A private detective named Matt Cordell had found his wife in the arms of one of his operatives, a man named Garth. He had used the butt end of a .45 on him. The police hadn't liked the idea. The police had lifted Cordell's license, and Garth had taken Cordell's wife, Trina. He'd been left with nothing, nothing at all. Nothing but the bottle.

I started the way I had to start, in the streets. I kept my eyes open and my ears open, and the August sun didn't help my job because

the August sun was very hot. When a shirt is dirty it sticks like glue. When your soles are thin, the pavement scorches up through them. When you need a haircut, your hair mats to your forehead, clinging and damp. I took to the streets, and I thought of gin and tonics and fancy restaurant-bars. I talked to Fritzie first.

Fritzie's arm was still in a cast. Fritzie's face had not been hurt too badly, except for the bridge of his nose, which was still swollen. The back of his head carried a large patch, and you could see the bald spot surrounding it, where the doctors had shaved his hair to get at the cut.

"Farvo's dead," I told him. "Did you know that?"

"Yeah," Fritzie said. "I heard."

"We figure the same guy who's been doing the rest. You think so?"

"It could be," Fritzie said.

"Did you get a look at the guy?"

"No," Fritzie said.

"Where'd it happen."

"On Houston. I'd made a big kill, Matt. Six bits from some society guy and his broad. You shoulda seen this broad, Matt, diamond clips in her hair, and her bubs all spilling out the front of her dress. It was her got him to give me the six bits."

"Go ahead, Fritzie."

"I got a jug, you know? Some cheap stuff, but what the hell, all wine tastes the same."

"So?"

"So I killed the jug, and I was walking down Houston, and that's when the El fell down."

"Did you see who hit you?"

"I told you. No. I got hit on the back of the head." Fritzie's hand went up to the patch, his fingers touching it gingerly.

"What happened then?"

"I fell down, and the son of a bitch kicked me in the face. That's how I got this nose. It's a wonder it didn't come out the hole in the back of my head." Fritzie shook his head forlornly.

"Then what?"

"Then nothing, as far as I'm concerned. That was all she wrote, Matt. I blacked out. When I come to, I see my arm there next to my side, but it's pointing up in the wrong direction, as if it was glued on wrong at the elbow. Matt, it hurt like a bastard."

"What'd you do?"

"I went to the clinic. They said I had a compound fracture. They set it for me. It was no picnic, man."

"You have any money on you?"

"Hell, no," Fritzie said. He paused and touched his patch again. "What do you think, Matt?"

"Jesus," I said, "I don't know."

Detective-Sergeant Thomas Randazzo was a good-looking man in a brown tweed suit. The uniformed cop led me into his office, and Randazzo rose, smiled, and offered me his hand, which I took.

"Cordell, huh?" he said.

"Yes," I told him.

"What's on your mind, Cordell?"

"A man named Gino Farvo was beaten to death a few nights ago," I said. "I was wondering . . ."

"We're working on it now," Randazzo said, still smiling pleasantly.

"Have you got anything yet?"

"Why?" he said.

"I'm working on it, too."

"You?" Randazzo's eyebrows quirked in smiling curiosity.

"Yes," I said. "Me."

"I thought your license had been yanked."

"I'm working on it as a private citizen."

"Maybe you'd better leave it to us," Randazzo said politely.

"I'm interested in it," I said. "These men are my friends. These men . . ."

"What do you mean, these men?"

"Farvo isn't the first," I said. "He just happens to be the most."

"Oh, I see." Randazzo paused. "So naturally, you're interested."

"Yes," I said.

Randazzo smiled. "Forget it, Cordell. We'll take care of it."

"I'd rather . . ."

"Cordell, you've had enough headaches with the police department. No look, seriously, I'm not trying to be a smart guy. I know all about that time with your license, and I know all about your wife this last time."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Nothing. She wants to kill . . . what was his name? . . . Garth, yes, that's okay with me. But I know what it must have done to you, and . . ."

"That's all water under the bridge," I said. I didn't tell Randazzo that Trina had tried to set me up as a patsy in the Garth kill. I didn't tell him that she'd worn out her second husband, pumped him full of bullets in the bathtub, and then tried to hang the frame on me. Randazzo didn't have to know all that. And he didn't have to know how I'd felt about it, how it seemed like the end of the world, worse than the first time, much worse. Or how I'd come out of it with the feeling that nothing further could happen to me. Garth was dead now, and Trina was set for the chair, and that was it, all the memories washed away, except they could never be washed away. The motive gone, but the results remaining by force of habit. I didn't tell Randazzo all that.

"Water under the bridge," he said. "Fine and good, Cordell. Don't mess in this, please. I appreciate your offer of help, no, honestly, I really do. But you've had enough to do with cops. You've had enough to last you a lifetime." He paused. "Why don't you get out of the Bowery, Cordell?"

"I like the Bowery," I said.

"Have you ever tried to get your license back?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"That's my business. Randazzo, have you got any leads on this Farvo thing? Anything at all? Anything I can . . ."

Randazzo shook his head. "I'm sorry, Cordell. I don't want you in this."

"Okay," I said.

"You understand? It's for your own good."

"Sure."

"Don't be sore at me. I'm just . . ."

"I'm not sore at you."

"No?"

"No. I'm sore at whoever killed Farvo."

I talked to Diego, who had been beaten very badly a few weeks back. Diego had been the first, and we hadn't thought too much about it at the time, until the beatings took on the look of an epidemic. Diego was from Puerto Rico, and he didn't talk English too well. The scars on his face had healed by this time, but whoever had beaten him had left scars deep in his eyes that time would never remove.

"Why you bother me, Matt?" he asked. "I know nothing. I swear."

"Farvo was killed," I said.

"So? Me, I am not killed. Matt, I do not want another beating. Leave me out, Matt."

"Diego," I said, "I'm trying to piece together . . ."

"I don't care what you try to do. I don't want more trouble, Matt."

"Look, you stupid bastard, what makes you think this is the end?"

"Huh?" Diego asked.

"You going to stay inside all day and all night? You never going to come up for air? What makes you think you're safe? What makes you think you won't get another beating some night when you're lushed up and roaming the streets? You *might* be Farvo, next time."

"No," Diego said, shaking his head. "Matt, I don't know nothing anyway. Even I want to help you, I can't."

"You didn't see who hit you?"

"No."

"Tell me what happened."

"I don't remember."

"Diego, if you know something, you'd better tell me. You'd damn well better tell me, or you'll get another beating, right this minute, and this time you won't be so lucky."

Diego tried to smile. "Oh, come on, Matt. Don't talk like that, man."

"What do you say, Diego?"

He must have seen something in my eyes. He looked at me quickly, and then ducked his head.

"I dinn see nobody, Matt," he said.

"Were you struck from behind?"

"Yes."

"With what?"

"Something hard. I don't know what. Hard like a rock."

"A gun?"

"I don't know."

"What happened then?"

"I fell down."

"Unconscious?"

"No."

"What happened?"

"He grab me under the arms and pull me off the sidewalk. Then he kick me."

"He put you down and kicked you?"

"I don't know. It's hard to remember, Matt. He drag me, an' then I get a kick. An' then I get another kick. An' then he starts hitting me on the face, an' kicking me all the time."

"He kept kicking you and hitting you?"

"Like he have ten arms an' legs, Matt. All over me. Hard." Diego shook his head, remembering.

"Did he say anything to you?"

"No. Yes, wait a minute. Yes, he say something."

"What did he say?"

"He say, 'Come on, bum' and then he laugh."

"What did his voice sound like?"

"Well, it was high first, an' then it get low later."

"He spoke twice?" I asked.

"Yes. Yes, I think so. Twice, or maybe more. It's hard to remember. He was hit me all this time."

"What did he say the second time."

"He say 'I got him'."

"And his voice was lower you say?"

"Yes, lower. Lower than the first time."

" 'I got him.' Is that what he said? When was this?"

"When he start hitting me in the face."

"Did he steal anything from you?"

"I got nothing to steal, Matt," Diego said.

"I figured," I said. "Were you lushed when he got you?"

Diego smiled. "Sure," he said.

There were no further beatings for three weeks. This wasn't hard to work out. Whoever had killed Farvo apparently realized the heat was on. In three weeks, the cops would have lost their interest. In three weeks, Farvo would be just another grave with wilted flowers, Farvo would be just another name in the Open File. So for three weeks, the community that was the Bowery lived its normal life. For three weeks, my friends and neighbors went unmolested. But we waited, because we knew the beater would strike again, as soon as things cooled down. Once a pattern is established, it's difficult to break.

I waited along with the rest, but I waited harder. I waited by walking the streets at night. I walked down all the dark streets, staying away from the brightly-lighted areas. I walked with a simulated roll in my step. Sometimes I sang loudly, the way a drunk will sing when he's on a happy toot. I lurched along crazily, and I grabbed at brick walls for support, and I hoped someone would hit me on the back of the head, but no one did. It's not fun being bait. It's not fun when you

know a fractured skull can be in the cards. And suspecting what I now suspected, it was even less fun. But I set myself up as a target, and I did my heavy drinking during the day so that I could be cold sober while play-acting the drunk at night.

For three weeks, nothing happened.

The hottest day of the year came at the tail end of August, as if Summer were making a last bid for recognition before Autumn piled in. It was a bitch of a day, and even liquor couldn't kill the pain of the heat. The night wasn't any better. The night closed in like a damp blanket, smothering the city with darkness. There wasn't a breeze blowing. The heat lay on the rooftops, baked in the bricks, shimmered on the asphalt. The heat was a plague that hovered over the city, a life-choking thing that stuck in the nostrils and suffocated the throat.

I started at ten.

I put on my drunken walk, and I staggered up the streets, stopping to panhandle every now and then, making it look legit in case I was being tailed. I didn't think whoever'd killed Farvo was the tailing kind of killer, but I played it safe anyway. The heat made me want to scream. It crawled up my back and under my armpits and into my crotch. It left me dry and tired, and it made me wish I was really drunk instead of just playing at it.

I didn't hit pay dirt until twelve-thirty.

The street was very dark. It lay like a black nightstick between the buildings, dark and straight and silent. There was no one on the street. I looked down it, and then I huddled against the wall for a second, like a drunk trying to clear his head, and then I started down it, walking crazily, stumbling once or twice. I passed an alleyway between the buildings, and I stopped against the wall just past the alleyway, hoping to draw something out of the black opening. I drew nothing.

I started walking again, and I stumbled again, and then I got to my feet and burped and I said "Son 'fa bitch" like a drunk cursing at the world in general. I didn't have to act very hard.

I passed a second alleyway, and I saw the shadow snake out over the brick wall an instant before the pipe hit the back of my head. I'd been waiting for the blow for three weeks, and I rolled with it now, my thick matted hair cushioning the strike a little, the roll taking away some of the power behind it, but not all of it, the pain still rocking my head and erupting in a sort of yellow flash. But the pain passed before I dropped to the sidewalk, and my head was clear because Farvo's killer was about to try the act again, the act that was always good for an encore.

I lay there like a dead man, and then there were footsteps coming from the alleyway, and I felt hands under my armpits, and then a high

voice said, "Come on, bum," and the voice trailed away into a delighted kind of laughter, an almost hysterically ecstatic laughter.

My heels dragged along the sidewalk, and I tensed myself, waiting for what was coming, ready for it. The hands under my armpits released their grip, and my back hit the concrete, and then a shoe lashed out, catching me on the shoulder, hurting me, but I didn't make my play, not even then. Another kick came, and I tried to roll with it, waiting, listening in the darkness.

"I got him," the voice said, and it was a lower voice, just the way Diego had said, but it sure as hell wasn't the same voice that had spoken first. And then, out of the darkness, a third voice said, "Come on, come on," and I figured the full cast was there then, so I went into action.

The "I got him" voice was starting to straddle me, ready to use the fists he'd used on Diego and Farvo and all the other boys. I didn't wait for him to finish his straddle, and I didn't waste a lot of time with him. I jack-knifed my leg, and then I shot out with my foot, and I felt the sole of my shoe collide with his crotch, and I was sure I'd squashed his scrotum flat. He let out a surprised yell, and the yell trailed away into a moan of anguish. He dropped to the pavement, clutching at his pain, and I got to my feet and said, "Hello, boys."

I'd underestimated their numbers. There were four of them, I saw, and four was a little more than I'd bargained for. I-Got-Him was rolling on the ground, unable to move, but the other three with him were very much able to move, and two of them were blocking the mouth of the alleyway now. The third was a big hulking guy who stood across from me on the opposite wall.

"Having a little sport, boys?" I said.

They couldn't have been more than eighteen or nineteen years old. They were big boys, and the summer heat had put a high sheen of sweat on the young muscles that showed where their tee shirts ended.

"He ain't drunk," one of the boys in the alley mouth said.

"Not drunk at all," I told him. "Does that spoil the kicks?"

"Let's get out of here, Mike," the other boy blocking the alley mouth said.

The boy opposite me kept looking at me. "Shut up," he said to the boys. "What's your game, mister?"

"What's yours, sonny?"

"I'm asking the questions."

"And I've got the answers, sonny. All of them. I figured you for just one crazy bastard at first. One crazy bastard with strong fists and feet. But then things began getting a little clearer, and I began to figure you for more than one crazy bastard. I asked myself *why?* Why beat up bums, guys with no money? Sure, roll an uptown lush, but why a Bowery bum? It figured for noth-

ing but kicks then, kicks from a deadly dull summer. And then I asked myself, who's got time on their hands in the summer?" I paused "What high school do you go to, sonny?"

"Take him," Mike said, and the two boys rushed in from the alley mouth, ready to take me.

The boys were amateurs. The boys had got their training in street fights or school fights, but they were strictly amateurs. It was almost pitiful to play with them, but I remembered what they'd done to Farvo, just for kicks, just for the laughs, just for the sport of beating the hell out of a drunken bum, and then I didn't care what I did to them.

I gave the first boy something called a Far-Eastern Capsize. As he rushed me, I dropped to one knee and butted him in the stomach with my head. I swung my arms around at the same time, grabbing him behind both knees, and then raising myself from one knee and snapping him back to the pavement. He screamed when he tried to break his fall with his hands, spraining them, and then his head hit the concrete, and he wasn't doing any more screaming. I pulled myself upright just as his pal threw himself onto my back, and I didn't waste any time with him, either. I went into a Back Wheel, dropping again to my knees, surprising the hell out of him. Before he got over his surprise, I had the little finger of his left hand between my own hands, and I shoved it back as far as it would go, and then some. He was too occupied with the pain in his hand to realize that I was tugging on it, or that his body was beginning to lean over my head. I snapped to my feet again, and he went down butt over teacups, and then I reached down for him and drove my fist into his face with all my might.

Mike was huddled against the wall. Mike was the leader of these pleasure-seekers, and I saved the best for Mike. I closed in on him slowly, and he didn't at all like the turn of events, he didn't at all like being on the other end of the stick for a change, even though he carried a lead pipe.

"Listen," he said. "Listen, can't we . . ."

"Come on, bum," I said, and then I really closed in.

Detective-Sergeant Randazzo was very happy to close the case. He was so happy that he asked me afterwards if I wouldn't like him to buy me a drink. I said no thanks, and then I went home to the Bowery, and that night we all sat around and passed a wine jug, me and Danny and Angelo and Diego and the Professor and Marty and oh, a lot of guys.

My friends and neighbors.

The Bargain

BY CHARLES BECKMAN, JR.

Frank and his wife were going to die. There was only one way out — and Frank didn't want to take it.

THE DAY it happened, I took Mavis, my wife, to the hills for our first week-end in the mountain cabin.

I remember that afternoon I was sprawled out on a big rock, soaking up sunshine, watching Mavis splash in the clear mountain stream that ran through our property. I was feeling pretty satisfied with myself and life in general. Not many insurance men in their

early thirties could afford a mountain hide-away like this besides a comfortable place in town.

Mavis swam over to the rock and pulled herself, shining and dripping out of the water and sat beside me. She drew off her cap, shook her hair out, then pushed her strapless swim suit down to her waist and stretched out for a sun bath.

My blood pressure took a sharp climb. Yep, I had no complaints about the deal life had given me. Besides the house in town, the car, and the mountain shack, I had a beautiful young wife with a terrific figure.

I watched her contentedly for a while, then began dozing, drugged by the sunshine and the warm rock against my belly.

It must have been about three o'clock when we heard the stirring in the brush. Mavis saw him first. She half-turned, staring over my shoulder; then her dark eyes widened. With a smothered gasp, she sat up, jerking at the top of her swim suit.

I rolled over and propped myself on one elbow.

He came slowly out of the brush near the trail that led down from our cabin. A man of about twenty-six, he had thick hair and he was dressed in a flashy sport coat, flannel slacks and dark blue suede shoes. "Hi," he said, and his eyes went restlessly from Mavis to me, then up and down the creek bank.

I climbed to my feet, sore at the way he'd slipped up on us, catching Mavis with her bathing suit pushed half off. We had "no trespassing" signs up all over the property.

"Looking for somebody?" I asked shortly.

His eyes glanced up and down the creek, restlessly probing the brush on the other side, then they moved back toward Mavis. "Nice cabin you've got up there," he said, ignoring my question, looking at Mavis. "Very nice. I saw it when I started down the trail. You got a telephone in the cabin?"

"No," I said. "We don't have a telephone." In about five seconds I was going to take a poke at him for staring at Mavis that way. It was making her uncomfortable. Nervously, she put her hand across the top of the red lastex bathing suit where it dipped above the curve of her breasts.

Mavis had been raised very strictly by a puritanical family and she was easily embarrassed.

"This is private property," I said pointedly to the guy. "You lost or something?"

"Car trouble," the man smiled. It wasn't a very warm smile.

"Let's have a look. Maybe I can help you get it started." I wanted him to get away from there. The week-end would be short enough. He'd already broken the peaceful charm of the afternoon.

We all walked up the trail to the cabin where he said he'd left his car. When we reached the clearing be-

hind the shack, I saw his car, a gray Hudson parked behind my own Buick convertible. I got to thinking about it as we walked across the clearing and it didn't exactly make sense that his car would stall here by accident. You had to turn off the main road and follow a private lane for at least a mile to get here. He'd deliberately driven past all the "private road — no trespassing" signs to get here. I stopped and turned toward him, good and sore now. "Listen, you —"

He was leaning nonchalantly against a tree, lighting a cigarette that dangled from one corner of his mouth. His other hand gripped a nasty-looking black revolver that was pointed at my stomach.

It took a moment or two to sink in. Then icy-footed insects ran up and down my spine and the palms of my hands got sticky.

Mavis was staring at the gun, too. The first shock in her eyes gave way to fear that widened her pupils.

"Frank," she whispered, moving closer to me.

"Take it easy, hon," I said. My tongue felt thick and sticky. The blood started pounding behind my eyes. "Look," I said hoarsely to the guy, "I don't bring much money up here. What I have is in the house in my trouser pocket. Twenty or thirty bucks. That's all I have. You're welcome to it. I'll —"

He cut me off with a short, hard laugh.

Then he waved the gun toward the cabin and talked around the cigarette which was pasted in one corner of his lips. "In there, both of you. And no fast moves. I don't mind using this."

He followed us into the cabin and kicked the door closed behind him with his heel. "All right," he said, standing before the door, spraddle-legged, "you've got a guest for a few days. I'm in a little jam. We're all going to stay here in the cabin until it cools."

"Listen —"

"Shut up. If you do the listening and don't give me any trouble, you might get out of this alive. Figure it that way." The smoke drifted from his nostrils and he looked through it at Mavis. I could feel her shiver against me.

That's how it started. This guy — he told us his name was Pete Vance — locked the door. Mavis and I sat close together on the sofa and watched him, numbly.

He took a bottle of beer from the ice box, then he turned the radio on and sat in a hide-bottom chair propped against the wall. He'd taken his sport coat off and under it was a dark blue sport shirt and two-inch wide, gray suspenders. He sat with the heels of his suede shoes hooked in a rung of the chair and stared at Mavis's bare shoulders and legs.

From the newscasts he caught on the radio, we put together the story of why he was hiding. Last night he had broken into a wholesale drug warehouse in a nearby town and

stolen a large amount of narcotics. But when he was getting away, he had a running gun battle with state police. He killed one of them and the others recognized him from a past record. Now the police had a state-wide road blockade pinning him down.

The sun went down; it got chilly. Mavis put a chenille robe around herself, shivering.

"What are we going to do, Frank?" she whispered desperately. She began crying a little, whimpering.

"Easy, hon," I whispered, taking her hand. "I'll think of something —"

"If he'd only stop looking at me that way," Mavis whispered raggedly. "He — he keeps staring at me as if I were *naked.* . . ."

Impotent fury came up into my throat like a sick, rotten taste.

That night was pure hell. Mavis dozed fitfully. Pete Vance didn't close his eyes once. He sat on the other side of the room, with his eyes burning at us out of a sullen face. Toward morning, my throbbing eyelids closed and I dozed for an hour and then awoke with a start, my neck stiff.

The morning sunshine broke through the pines and laid a dust-flecked beam across the cabin's rough, splintery floor. Wearily, like a frightened, exhausted terrier scratching for an escape out of a pen, my mind attacked this nightmare again.

I searched the cabin, for some kind of weapon for the thousandth time. And even while I was looking, I admitted the impossibility of using anything I might find. Vance was keeping a relentless vigil over us. He hadn't relaxed for an instant.

The cabin's main room was big, thirty or forty feet long, with a fireplace made out of fire-blackened stones down at one end. There was a rough table and some hide-bottom chairs near the fireplace. The couch where we were sitting was at the other end of the room near a row of windows. Behind us were two doors. One led to a small bathroom with old-fashioned, but workable plumbing. The other opened onto a small bedroom.

There were two doors opening out of the building. One was at the fireplace end, behind Vance. The other opened out of the bedroom. It was kept locked.

From where we were sitting, I could look through the window and see our Buick parked at the edge of the clearing, headed into the lane. If we could get out there, the powerful car would take us down the lane to the main road in a matter of minutes. But the car might as well be parked at the other end of the universe for all the good it did us.

This whole thing began getting on Mavis's nerves pretty bad by noon of that second day. The sleepless night and, worst of all, Pete Vance's leering eyes were pushing her near the breaking point.

She wasn't used to that sort of thing. She'd led a sheltered, strict life until I married her and I knew, I hadn't gotten her third or fourth hand, or even second hand. I'd been the only man who had ever touched her and I'd always leaned over backward not to offend her strong sense of shame and modesty.

Vance never left his chair, except to get another bottle of beer out of the ice box. He had been drinking and smoking steadily and he began getting tight. Then he got bolder with Mavis. He began talking, instead of just looking.

He lit a fresh cigarette and chuckled under his breath. "That's some jerk you're married to, honey," he suddenly said to Mavis. "Why don't you wise up and ditch him and come along with me? You and me could have a big time on the dough from that drug heist. I'd show you a good time, baby. I'd teach you a few things that jerk you're married to never heard about!"

Mavis shuddered, drawing the chenille robe more tightly about her. Her wide, pupil-blackened eyes stared at Pete like a rabbit cornered by a pack of hounds. I jumped to my feet, my fists bunched. "Put that gun down for just one minute," I invited through my teeth.

He grinned at me. "Hold it, buster. I might have to use it. I keep hoping you'll try to make a break, so I'll have to use it. If I did, the chick would be a widow." He chuckled again, softly. "I like widows." His eyes went over Mavis again, like a pair of hands, fondling her.

The psychology of Pete Vance became pretty obvious as he sat there, talking to Mavis. He was an egomaniac. A good-looking young punk who dressed in flashy clothes and thought he was God's gift to the women.

The afternoon wore on and he kept talking and it was like hearing a record playing over and over. Brag, brag, brag. He boasted about the money he'd stolen, about all the women he'd seduced, about what a wonderful lover he was. And always he came back to the same point: Mavis. "You're a good-looking little chick. Why don't you ditch this jerk? Why don't you be nice to Pete, honey? You've got what it takes, with those legs and the rest. I bet you'd be good in bed. I bet you'd be damn good. . . ."

And always the raw, sickening fury going through me, making my muscles weak and trembling. Wondering how much more of it I could listen to before I ignored the gun in his sun-tanned manicured hand and ran at his throat.

Finally, I did make a dive at him. Mavis had gotten up and walked to the sink for some water. Pete Vance's eyes, red-rimmed from alcohol and loss of sleep, watched the movement of her hips, hungrily. He got up and moved to where she was standing and slipped his hand around her waist. She whirled with a gasp,

dropping her glass of water, and he tried to kiss her.

That broke it for me. I came up off the couch and went at him blindly, forgetting the gun in his hand, forgetting everything except the eagerness in my fingers for his throat. But he spun around, unsteady from the beer, and swung the heavy gun across my face before I could get hold of him. The floor came up to meet me. He grinned and leveled the gun at me with sudden kill lust in his eyes.

Mavis screamed and threw herself in front of me and saved my life. The chenille robe split open across her legs as she knelt over me and the gun-happy punk stared down at her bared white thighs and licked his lips and forgot about shooting me.

Mavis helped me back to the couch where I slumped, dazed.

"Wanna try it again, buster?" Pete Vance invited. He stood in front of me, spraddle-legged, with the gun. He stood there for a few minutes while the murderous fire slowly cooled in his eyes and then he went to the ice box for another beer.

When he was out of earshot, Mavis began speaking to me in a low, quick voice.

"Listen to me, Frank, and don't interrupt. I've been thinking this thing out. I've — I believe I know how we can get out of this mess."

I blinked at her through the sick dizziness of my throbbing head. There was a feverish look in her eyes. Her face was white and there was a grim determination about her mouth that I had never seen before.

"I've thought about it all morning," she went on, whispering, "and we might as well face it. We aren't going to get out of this alive if we just sit around. He'll kill us before he leaves. He'd know if he left us alive we'd have the state police after him before he'd drive a hundred miles. He won't chance that. If the police lift the blockade and if we're — dead, then he'll have plenty of time to get safely away."

She drew a breath and licked her lips. "I don't want to die, Frank. I don't want you to die. We've both got too much to keep living for."

"What are you getting at?" I whispered. "What can we do?"

She looked away from me when she said it. She didn't let me see her face. "I'm going to — let Pete have what he wants. . . ."

The blood got thicker at my head and began driving through my temples in heavy, turgid throbs. "You're crazy," I said, my voice trembling. "Mavis, look at me. You're crazy. You don't think I'd let you —"

"It's gone past that," she whispered, white-faced. "It's gone past your letting me or not letting me. I don't want us to die."

"Mavis —"

Her words hissed at me through the hard, bright enamel of her teeth. "Do you think he'll leave without getting what he wants? Do you, Frank? You know he's going to take

it sooner or later, anyway. Then he'll kill us. I'm just taking something that's inevitable anyway and trading it for a chance for our lives."

She kept whispering at me, soft, stinging words that bit like wasp stings through the humming in my head.

"I'm going to get him to lock you in the bedroom. I'll give him a key to the outer door. But there's another key in the closet in there. Remember? We hid it on that nail. When he puts you in there, wait a few minutes, then unlock the back door and run down to the car. If you're quiet about it, you can take the brake off and roll down the lane a piece before starting the motor. If you're lucky, you can get the state police and come back before he knows you're even gone."

"Mavis!" If a man can scream in a whisper, I did it. "I won't let you —"

She said it. The four whispered words that closed the bargain. "You can't stop me. . . ."

Then she got up off the couch and walked away, over to the window and stood in a patch of sunlight. Suddenly, she untied the chenille belt and shrugged out of the robe and it fell in a loose puddle around her ankles. Then she stood straight and proud in the hot sunlight with nothing but the brief red bathing suit covering her.

Over at the fireplace, Pete Vance finished the bottle of beer, wiped the back of his hand across his mouth. He stared at Mavis in the brief red suit, in the patch of sunlight that touched her jersey cream complexion and night-black hair like a spotlight. Unsteadily, he walked across the room to where she was standing. He was holding the gun loosely at his side in his right hand. He moved up to her, devouring her with his eyes. He let his left hand fall around her waist. "Sun bathing, baby?" he leered thickly.

Restlessly, she moved away from him a step. "Don't," she said, her voice low.

But he moved closer and put his hand back and this time she did not pull away. His grin became triumphant. "Maybe you're changing your mind, baby?"

Slowly, she pivoted in a half turn until she was looking up at him. She drew a deep breath that thrust the full roundness of her breasts against the low top of the bathing suit. I could read her answer on her lips as she looked up at him. She said, "Maybe."

That was all he needed.

With anybody else it wouldn't have worked. But with an ego-riddled, half-drunk kid like this Pete Vance, it worked fine. It was the only outcome that his inflated self-esteem would really accept. Naturally, Mavis would come around to seeing things his way. What girl in her right mind would pass up the opportunity to make love with the handsome Pete Vance?

His face was flushed. His left arm pulled her tighter against him, then his left hand moved up her side to her breast.

I came off the couch, then, but he swung Mavis around so that her back was toward me and his right hand came up, pointing the gun at me. He was grinning crazily at me over her other shoulder. "Wanna try it again, huh, buster?"

She was whispering something to him, low and urgent, looking up at his face, her lips inches from his. Pete Vance released her and came over toward me. "The lady is a little embarrassed about puttin' out with her ol' man settin' around, watching. C'mon, buster. You're goin' to spend a little time locked in the back room."

I began cursing. I cursed Vance and then I cursed Mavis and it was a convincing performance, because I wasn't entirely acting. Then I swung at Vance and he brought the gun up and knocked me flat again.

When I came around, I was on the bed in the other room. I dragged myself to the door and listened. I heard Pete Vance's laughter. I heard Mavis's low, throaty voice, then moments of silence. Standing there, I went a little crazy. I beat against the door and cursed. Then I came to my senses and I knew I had to play it Mavis's way from here on; there was no other way — now.

I opened the closet, found the extra back door key hanging there. It was very quiet in the other room, now. Holding my breath, I unlocked the back door. I ducked and ran. It was several hundred yards to the car. Any moment, I expected to hear the crash of the gun. But I made it to the Buick and opened the door and slid in and there was only the hush of the woods around me. I slipped the emergency brake off. The big car began rolling down the incline. I held my breath, fighting the urge to slam the powerful motor into action and dig out of there. Finally, it was safe to start the motor. I drove slowly, gradually going faster until I hit the turn off to the main road. I was doing ninety when I hit the concrete. . . .

I found the state police less than five miles from there, two cars. I led them back to the clearing and we got out of the cars and went to the cabin and yanked the front door open.

Mavis had done a good job. Pete Vance had been too busy to know that I had left or come back. He went scrambling off the couch after his gun and they stopped him before he even got near it. I saw the white flash of Mavis's body. She grabbed up the chenille robe and covered herself with it and turned away from the men, crying.

Two of the state troopers had to hold me off of Pete Vance. When they got him out, I went to Mavis and awkwardly put my arm around her. I didn't know what to say. She was still crying. "It's all right now," I said. "It's all over, honey. It's all right. . . ."

I tried to comfort Mavis the best I could as we went back into town afterwards. But she seemed numb, frozen, and there was a wall between us. I knew what it had cost her. I had been married to her long enough to know that even with her own husband, the man she loved, sex was a distasteful thing to be endured out of a sense of duty.

I thought we might take a trip or something and try to forget this dirty nightmare. I thought that we could go back where we started.

But we had to appear at the arraignment of Pete Vance, first, as witnesses. We sat in the room and watched them bring Pete Vance in. I happened to glance toward Mavis. She didn't know I was looking at her. But I was looking at her all right. I couldn't stop.

Her lips were slightly parted. She was staring at Pete Vance and there was a hot, bright, hungry look in her eyes.

Then I knew that nothing would ever be the same again.

It didn't matter how I felt. I was a cop. I'd have to take her back to town — dead or alive . . .

Clean Getaway

A Novelette

BY WILLIAM VANCE

I PARKED the department car, a plain black sedan, across the street from the Apoco Court, a pink stucco motel, old enough to have a few struggling vines creeping upward toward the exposed beams of the rafters. Southwestern wind and sun had turned the lawn into a sickly greenish-brown. I turned the ignition off and got a cigarette and started to push in the lighter. I remembered the battery was low and found a book

of matches wedged down behind the seat, fished it out between two fingers, watching the court all the time.

The cigarette tasted as flat as the rest of them had for the past twelve hours and I threw it away and looked at my watch. It was 6:10 A.M. The pinch was set for 6:15. Five minutes to go. I'd found her in bed with a man a million years ago and I suddenly wondered how it would be, finding her like that again. My palms were damp. Deep down in my guts there was a familiar pain.

Steve Ortega passed me in his personal car and wheeled around the corner to the west side of the court. He parked across the street and I watched him get out of his car and disappear from my sight, behind the gray concrete wall that was part of the court, a middle to low class motel. Just the kind a hot lamister would pick for a night's lodging. A night's lodging with a beautiful dame. A beautiful dame with a tall, sensational body. I crowded a lot of thoughts out of my mind.

A dry-cleaning panel passed me and wheeled into the court and stopped in front of number six. Ole Anderson had loaned me the truck after I'd promised to have any damage repaired. Not that I thought there'd be any trouble, but in this business you can never tell. Ole always expected the worst. A smart guy, I thought, a really smart guy.

Ramon Cadenza remained in the driver's seat of the panel. I couldn't see the two men inside the truck but I knew they were there. I'd watched them climb in ten minutes before, in back of City Hall, just a little while after the briefing session in my office.

I patted the Magnum under my arm and put my hand on the door latch. I froze there. An elderly man came out of number five and put two suitcases on the cement walk while I cursed softly under my breath. The elderly man turned and stood with his arms akimbo, as a fat woman waddled down and motioned upward. The elderly man looked at the sky and I could see his lips move. I cursed again, thinking how a small thing like this could foul up my plans. The man was saying the sky was beautiful just like all the tourists before him and those who followed would say. Only now, he was trading his life for a look at a morning sun and mountain and sky paint job.

I pushed the door open, thinking I'd go over and take a chance and hurry the couple on. I stopped when he bent and lifted the two suitcases and went toward the carport beside number five. The woman opened the trunk and the man placed the two suitcases inside and slammed the lid shut. The woman looked bulky in the brilliantly colored squaw skirt. The two of them disappeared from my view and a moment later I sighed with relief as the car backed and then headed for the street. The car was a green Plymouth and carried a Maryland license plate.

The couple looked straight ahead.

The car turned west on Highway 66.

2.

The sun edged over the stark black outline of the Sandias as I got out of the car and went across the street. My legs felt sort of stiff like they always do when I'm walking into something. Stiffer than usual, though, because she was in there. I came up behind the cleaning truck. Ramon got out and stood there holding a man's suit over one arm. I saw a little bead of sweat on his brown forehead and his tiny black mustache quivered just enough to notice. The suit draped over his arm concealed the .38 in his hand. He gave me a taut, uncertain grin and started toward number six.

I was out of sight behind the truck. "Steve's got the back covered," I said. "Everything's all right, Ray."

Everything, that is, except Mark Nadine, Chief of Detectives. Nadine, the big city cop who'd gone native. Ramon nodded and stepped away, toward number six, moving fast now. And I waited, remembering. The fancy-stitched boots I wore helped me to remember. And the big hat. A native ring and the pounded silver watchband. I'd given it everything I had, hoping to wash off all that had accumulated on me in ten years of working on a big city police force. Where the fix was in. And a funny thing about that — it wasn't the fix that ran me out, but the girl with the beautiful legs. And if I wasn't mistaken she was behind that number six on the motel door.

Ramon was at the door, rapping. The noise was loud in the quiet of the morning. The plan was a good one. Ramon was supposed to act surprised when the door opened. He was supposed to step back, look up at the number, apologize and turn away. When the door closed, but before the man inside had a chance to lock it, I'd bust in and take them both. That initial call at the door would leave him relieved, and relaxed. He might not even have his gun in his hand.

I hoped he wouldn't have; Edgar Ball, an innocent-sounding name, for a killer. That's what the newspapers said, at any rate. They didn't have the girl's name right, but it was her picture. There wasn't anyone else in the world who looked like her. When she was born, God had broken the mold.

Ramon was knocking again and with the sound came the thought that maybe they wouldn't be there. It was almost a wish and it shook me for a moment. Then I blamed it on the chill morning, even as I felt the warmth of the sun now up over the mountain rim. Feeling the warmth in the bright rays, it seemed that things were accentuated all out of proportion, the warm sun on my neck, the rustle of the silvery-leafed cottonwoods and the thickening traffic stream on West Central, which is also Highway 66.

I had a feeling something was wrong. I wished I'd had the court cleared of everyone except the occupants of number six. But that activity might have tipped our hand. I walked over behind Ramon and he stepped aside with an audible sigh of relief and I tried the door. It was locked.

"Get the manager," I told Ramon and he walked toward the office at the front, still carrying the suit over his arm, while I pressed my ear against the door. I could hear nothing except the sounds around me.

In a moment, Ramon came back, followed by the manager. I took the keys from the man and fitted the key to the lock and gave it a twist and swung the door open, giving it a hard push.

It was a fool thing to do but I stepped quickly inside, flattening myself against the wall. The single room was empty. The bed clothing was rumpled. Two pillows were indented, indicating a couple had slept there. Cigarette butts overflowed the ash tray on the bedside stand. I moved around the room, swearing mentally. They were gone and they couldn't be, because we'd had them under surveillance almost since their arrival, the previous afternoon.

Ramon said, "What do you think, chief?" He threw the suit on a chair.

"I'm afraid to think," I said.

And I was. It was impossible and yet they were not there. The manager put his head in the door. "Not here?" he asked nervously, and stepped inside, his voice stronger, his manner perceptibly changed. "What do you want them for, chief?"

"Remember the Leafield kid?"

"Oh, no," he said. His adam's apple worked. He nodded, remembrance in the shine of his eyes.

"Them," I said. I suddenly remembered the car with the Maryland license plates. The elderly couple. It'd left, that green car had, just before we moved in. A sudden sweat broke out on me. I said, "Next door. Number five. Let's take a look."

Ramon went out first, the manager followed and I after him. I still had the keys. The manager rattled the door. "Bet they took the key with them," he said accusingly.

I pushed him aside and opened number five. I didn't have to go in. They were both in bed, just as they'd slept. A middle-aged couple, the man with salt and pepper hair, a lined, careworn face, the woman a motherly, white-haired type.

"Get out an alarm," I told Ramon. "To the State police. Green Plymouth with a Maryland license plate. Westbound. They can't get far. Also, have the office advise Kansas City and the local FBI. I'm going on."

Ramon, unloosening the tied couple, called, "Take the uniformed men." I didn't answer. I was sprinting across the street, dodging traffic,

to the car, feeling relieved and not wanting Ramon to see that relief.

3.

I kept my eyes open along Central West, watching for the green Plymouth in service stations and in front of restaurants. They might not be hungry, but assault doesn't bother some people. Or murder. Like the Leafield kid. They'd made the boy's old man for half a million. In unmarked small bills. First break on the case had dropped in my lap. The manager of the Apoco called me and told me there was a strange-acting couple in his court. Quarrelling, he'd said. He didn't know anything for sure, except the guy had a gun, a blue-steel pistol, a .38 or something like that. And the girl with him was just as tough as the guy, even if she was stacked and pretty. I'd already seen the newspaper pictures and just on a hunch I showed him the picture I still carried in my wallet without ever looking at it.

He'd said, "That's her, all right."

And the dread I'd felt ever since the newspaper picture appeared was confirmed.

The manager's identification had been enough. We staked out the place, notified the FBI and passed on the information. We were requested to make the pinch and I'd deliberately not notified the local FBI. Don't ask me why because I didn't know myself.

And now, I was cruising along West Central, looking for a green Plymouth with a Maryland license plate and hoping I wouldn't find it.

I jammed my foot on the brake. The car was parked between a motel and a service station and it was empty. No need to wonder what had happened. Taking no chances, they'd switched cars at the first opportunity. I cursed as I got on the radio and reported, asking the dispatcher to inform highway patrol to stop any car with a man and woman in it. I laid the microphone on the seat and got out of the car and walked over to the Plymouth. Nothing in it, nothing at all. I hadn't expected anything. I walked on over to the motel manager's office, rang the buzzer and waited, sweating. It took a half a dozen rings to bring a blinking-eyed man in robe and pajamas.

"No vacancies," he snapped and then came wide-awake when I told him who I was and showed him my badge. "Up late last night," he apologized. "Figured to sleep late this morning."

"Make it tomorrow," I said. "I think one of your guests is missing a car."

He went with me. We checked only those units that didn't hold a car and most of the tourists had pulled out early, it seemed. We found the owner in the seventh unit. He was a drug salesman and after calming down he gave me the

make and license number of his car. I went back to the department car and called the dispatcher and gave him the information and drove on up the long grade with the city dwindling behind me.

The highway stretched ahead, into the sky. Lots of traffic. Passing roadhouses, service stations, motels and a foreign car lot. They specialized in many makes of cars and what made me slow, I don't know. But that's where I found the drug salesman's car. And this time there was someone in it. A man. The man I'd seen drive out of the Apoco this morning. Her powder on his hair, to make him look older. He had a neat bullet hole in his right temple. He was lying on his side on the seat and there was blood on the bright seat covers and it had run down over the edge of the seat to the floor, where it stood in a sticky, dark puddle.

The woman was alone now. Alone, somewhere out on the highway. With a car that could do 170 if anyone could be found who'd keep the accelerator down long enough. Because a Ferrari was missing from the lot. Why, I wondered, did she take a car that could be identified as far off as it could be seen?

I called the dispatcher again and gave him the dope and drove westward. Not with any hope of catching up. A police special just doesn't overtake a Ferrari. But with the thought I might head her off if the state police turned her back with their roadblock at Cubero, just fifty or so miles west. That was a favorite spot of theirs for a roadblock. I figured that's where they'd put it up. I didn't get anything on the radio except routine business because the highway patrol is on a different frequency. But now and then the dispatcher gave me a call. Until I got over the mountain and then the calls faded. Nothing but static. I turned down the static and drove on as fast as the special would travel.

Ever get a sudden flash and everything falls into place? It happened like that with me, when I passed this road that turned off to the left. Just a plain gravel road, no markers, no nothing. Not on a lot of road maps. Maybe one person in a thousand knew it led to a pueblo, a cluster of mud and rock that held a half a hundred pueblo Indians who didn't particularly care to have tourists prowling around their homes. The road dims and brightens after the pueblo and wanders through the mountain and over the desert, across the International Boundary and into Mexico. Maybe one person in a thousand would know that and maybe someone on the lam and feeling the law breathing down their neck would turn off on a side road. Anyway, the reason for the Ferrari was plain. She didn't intend to be driving where people would recognize the car. And we, the two of us, had travelled that road on our honeymoon a couple of lifetimes ago.

Five miles off the highway, I rolled up in front of the first adobe and by that time I'd figured that she'd dropped him when he didn't want to go along with her plans. Or because she wanted all that half-million for herself. That part didn't make too much difference with me. I got out of the car and stretched as a tall, brown man wearing skin-tight levis and a green and red-checked shirt came out. He had enough silver on both wrists to start a jewelry store and it jangled as he walked toward the car.

"A foreign car," he said as he came up to the car. "Went through here like a bat out of hell."

Some of these Indians are really bright. "How long ago?"

"Maybe twenty minutes or so," he said. "Ran over one of my chickens."

I got back in the car. "I'll pay for it," I said, "on my way back."

"Watch the washouts," he called as I drove away.

4.

She'd hit the first washout travelling at a good clip. I saw the skid marks where the Ferrari had left the road. There was even a smell of dust in the air that irritated my sinus. She'd got the car back on the road, though, and after that she must have gone over the washouts pretty easy. No more skid marks.

I kept trying my radio but couldn't raise anyone. And no wonder, with all the ridges and mountains in between. I kept trying, though, and I started sweating as the gasoline gauge kept nudging me in the belly.

She ran out of gas before I did. I rounded a climbing turn and found the Ferrari sitting in the middle of the road. I jammed on the brakes and slid out on the driver's side, keeping low, protected by the car. On my side, the mountain fell away, almost sheer and a quick look over the edge told me she couldn't have gone there. Above me rose the rocky, rugged terrain of a red and yellow mountain, pitted with boulders ranging in size from a baseball to a house. There was crumbling gray shale and decaying ledges and a few windblown struggling cedars. Not a thing moved. Not a pebble rattled.

Tensing, I ran for the Ferrari and I had the Magnum in my hand now, gripping it tightly. I didn't know what I'd do, but that dead man made a vivid picture in my mind. I reached the low-built job and dropped to my knees, still on the left side. I peered inside and there was a bright piece of brilliant cloth on the seat. I pulled it out. Drapery from number five in the court. She was smart as hell to make a skirt of it. She was smart, I'd always known that. Except for a long time I hadn't known her mind ran in such deep, dark places.

I threw the drapery back into the

Ferrari and scanned the mountain above, my eyes going slowly from one side to the other, starting at the bottom. A cluster of small cedars, gnarled and wind-beaten. Crumpled rock, shredding slowly, with nature's shredder, wind and sun and little rain. A deep crevice, a queer-shaped rock, like a man with his arms outflung. I felt the quiver in my guts as I resolved it as a rock and not a man. My eyes went on and then jumped back to the man-shaped rock. Something had moved up there, a flutter of motion, of color.

Her voice broke a little. "I — I'm hurt — don't shoot!"

Sweat ran down into my eyes and I heard my own breathing, rasping and hoarse, caused by a sickness and an excitement that ran through me. That voice had been with me a lot of the time in the past five years. Running away from a big city filled with memories, running away from myself, had deepened those memories, if anything. Adopting a new outlook and new clothes and a new job and a new life had helped some, too, but now and then, in the middle of the night I'd awaken, hearing that voice, from the bed beside me, from a corner of the room, from my kitchenette.

"Throw out your gun," I called. "Throw it hard."

Sun glinted on blue metal as it arched up and over, dislodged a shower of pebbles as it landed and slid downward into the road, its black muzzle pointing at me. The gun had killed this day.

"There it is," she called.

"Now the other one," I said.

"That's all. Just one, that's all I had."

I couldn't take a chance. "Take off your clothes," I said. "Take everything off but your bra and panties. Then stand up."

"I won't," she said.

"Then you have got another gun," I said.

There was nothing but painful silence and I could hear my heart beating. Then something bright came across the rock and settled on the rocky ground. "I'm undressing," she called, with a break in her voice. "As fast as I can."

My heart was pounding like something gone mad. There was a warm metallic taste in my mouth and I kept running my tongue over my lips because they were dry and felt cracked.

The sun was in her golden hair as she stood upright. She stood there and took a step out from behind the rock, her tall spectacular body almost bare, except for her bra, outthrust, bursting and the filmy, dainty pink garter belt that held the stockings on her long, beautiful legs. She wasn't wearing panties.

She looked just as she had the last time I'd seen her in the courtroom, a youthful twenty-eight, with the pink bloom of health in her skin, her eyes soft and blue and demure

with a softly rounding chin, a slender white neck that was made for her tall, flamboyant body. Her waistline was small, tiny enough for me to encircle it with my two hands. And I had. Her legs were those of a hosiery model, long, slim, wonderfully molded and beautifully muscled.

"My ankle," she said. "I hurt it —" She stopped, her eyes on me, staring and I could see the expression of fear go, to be replaced with a glint of happy knowledge. She said, breathlessly, "I can't believe it!"

"Where's the dough?" I asked.

She continued to look at me with her wide, blue eyes shining, her red lips parted slightly and her breast heaving visibly. She took a step toward me. "Mark, Mark, aren't you —"

"No," I interrupted her. "Where's the dough?"

Her eyes went expressionless and her face became a careful mask. She dropped her head to one side in a gesture I remembered. "There. Can I put my clothes on now?"

I shook my head and said, "Wait," and scrambled up the mountain. I picked her clothing up, piece by piece and felt each piece and passed it to her. "Okay. Put 'em on." I didn't look at her.

5.

While she dressed I went behind the rock. The two suitcases were there. I lifted one. It was heavy. I put it on top of a rock and opened it. It was filled with currency, neatly banded and neatly stacked, level with the top of the suitcase rim.

She finished dressing as I fondled the money and she came over and stood beside me and put her hand on my arm. Her hand was shaking and she was trembling all over. She whispered, "Half a million, Mark! Half a million — and just you and me!"

I knocked her hand off my arm. "Just me," I said. "You won't be around." I knelt and grabbed her ankle. "Which one did you hurt?"

Her face whitened. Her full red lips thinned out. "That's it."

I massaged it between my fingers, roughly, and she screamed and fell to the ground, her fingers pulling at my hand. I let her ankle go and said, "It's not broken."

"I slipped," she muttered, sweat on her forehead. She bit her lip. "Hurts like everything."

I wanted to laugh. Hurts like everything. Anyone listening in would think she was a nice girl. A nice girl who'd gone for a hike and fell down. Except she'd fallen down when she was about sixteen. In high school. Making her mark the easy way and from there it was a step to getting money from her male teachers by blackmail. Oh, I'd followed it all out, after I suspected. She was born for the way she lived. Rotten. All that beauty hiding all that rottenness. I slapped

her, then. I left the print of my fingers on her face.

It was like hitting a rock or a tree. She brushed the hair from her eyes and she raised her head. "A fortune, Mark. More than you'll ever see again. And there's just you and me. Mexico not more than a few hours away." Her words came in a mad rush and she was panting and I felt my heart begin a heavy, leaden pounding that made me shake.

I called her a name and hit her again with my open hand on the other cheek. Her head snapped over and she whimpered and that sound did something to me. "Get on your feet."

She had her chin on her chest. "I — I can't walk," she said.

We stared at each other for a long moment and I felt my heart step up its mad beat. I picked her up and carried her down the mountain, sliding down over the embankment, riding my heels in a small avalanche to the road, feeling her arms tighten around my neck, feeling the soft warmth of her body and smelling the fragrance of her perfume. Her hair tickled my ear. It had done that before; I remembered carrying her across the threshold of our little walkup. Carrying her across the creek on our honeymoon, not more than a dozen miles from this spot. And carrying her to bed a hundred times. An experience that never grew old.

I yanked open the department car door and eased her down on the seat. I took off her shoe and stood there with it in my hand. "Take off your sock," I said.

She half-smiled at that as she slowly raised her dress and unhooked the snaps on her garter belt and brushed the stocking down her slender leg with long, red-tipped fingers. Her head was bent. "You always called them socks," she said. She lifted her stocking from the tip of her foot and raised her head and looked at me again.

I kept my eyes on her feet and I could feel the slow, painful hammering of my heart and my breath didn't come easy. I leaned over and took her ankle in my hand and she screamed. Her ankle had turned purple and was swollen. "We'll take care of it," I said, "at the jail." I raised my head and looked at her. There was a bruise on her cheek where I'd hit her. I wanted to touch it, to caress her, and I blocked those thoughts from my mind. "That's where you're going, you know. Jail. Just like any other criminal."

She lay back against the seat and closed her eyes. "Just like any other criminal," she repeated. She opened her eyes but she didn't look at me. "My biggest crime, Mark, was loving you. It wrecked me. Completely."

"Save it," I said. "Save it all." I went back up the mountain and got the two suitcases and lugged them to the car. I threw them on

the back seat and went around and crawled under the wheel. I took the gun she'd thrown to me out of my right coat pocket, and slipped it into the other pocket, on my left. I reached for the ignition.

She put her hand on mine, holding tight. "Wait, Mark. Please. Let's talk, just for a moment. There'll be a lot of time on my hands back there but I won't feel like talking. I've —"

I flung her hand away. "Don't tell me anything," I said, "unless you want to make a formal statement."

She relaxed in an alluring huddle on the seat. Her dress was high on her thighs, her slip falling an inch or so below. She saw me staring and a tiny smile of triumph — or hope — flickered in her blue eyes. "There must be something you want to hear," she said. She looked past me, to the rugged, colorful, mountains that marched off northward. "Remember our honeymoon — remember, Mark? It was near here —"

I didn't want to remember but I couldn't help myself. I couldn't keep from remembering. A tent beside a stream, up in the timbered country. Trees all around and the quiet and the feeling we were alone in the world. I only wondered that she remembered, too.

"You do remember," she said, her face close to my arm. "I can see it in your face, Mark." Her fingers reached up and touched my cheek, wandered past my ear to entangle my hair. My hat fell off. I pushed her away and got my hat and put it on and started the car. I began backing, leaning out the open door, looking for a place I could turn.

She turned off the ignition.

I wanted to hit her but I didn't. I sat there in a sort of stupid anguish, wanting to hit her but not doing it because there was something else holding me back. Maybe it was the memories of those days when I didn't work, on my days off, when I'd sleep late. She'd come into the bedroom with a bed tray piled high with grapefuit fixed for easy eating, poached eggs on toast, bacon fried crisp and jelly she'd made, and the morning paper tucked under her arm. She'd fix my pillows and kiss me and fuss over me and I loved it. Maybe I loved it more than I should, but then I'd been an orphan kid all my life and was starved for that sort of thing. I guess I'd have spent the rest of my life at her feet if she hadn't stepped out on me. If I hadn't investigated when I suspected.

"*Why'd you do it?*" I asked.

"You didn't trust me," she said.

"What's that got to do with it?"

She smiled and there was no humor in the smile. "Your suspicions — your careful tour of the house when you came home. Your third degree every time I went out. Your third degree about my day — all that started it."

I could only wonder. "I'm me,"

I said. "I don't believe — what the hell difference does it make? We're going."

"You are," she said, "the only man I ever loved. And still love. But you did everything —"

"Shut up," I said. "Shut up."

But she came close to me, whispering, her lips close to my ear and she was saying things and I was listening to them, because I wanted to; listening to them and remembering the hot sensuality of her body against mine, the urgency of her fierce possessiveness and how it was never the same with any other woman in the years after. And then somehow, we were back at the Ferrari and I was doing things that I didn't think about.

6.

She said, "Hurry, hurry," looking at the sky and looking back over the road, with anxiety in the wrinkle on her forehead. She lowered her eyes to mine as I stood at the open trunk of the police special with the red gallon can of gasoline in my hand. She ran to me and hugged me and pulled my head down and kissed me and all the old feelings came back with a rush and I didn't think about the years in between.

"Walk back down the road and keep watch," I said, just to get her away from me, half-hoping that might make some difference.

There was no difference . . . I put the gallon of gasoline in the Ferrari. I squatted there and found a stick of gum in my pocket and chewed it and then punched a hole in the department car gas tank with a screwdriver and got another gallon from there. I used the wad of gum to seal up the hole while I dumped the gas in the Ferrari's tank. I got less than a gallon the next time and that was it.

I took the two suitcases out of the police special and put them in the Ferrari. Then I called her and got her in the low-built job and I went back to the department car and got it started and drove it over the edge of the road. I got out then and muscled it over and watched it go end over end and then bounce and careen into a dry creek bed a thousand feet below. I breathed deep and then went over and crawled under the wheel of the Ferrari.

She slid close to me. I could feel the warmth of her hip and thigh. She put her head against my arm. She let out a contented little sigh.

We drove on and I didn't think about anything except the road ahead.

After awhile she said, "What's that?"

I stopped the car and looked out. A high-flying plane. I could tell it was an Air Force plane, but it made me think of the sheriff's flying posse. "We'd better get out of sight, off the road. Keep looking for a place to turn out."

I drove on.

A few miles later she said, "How's this?"

I braked to a stop. A dry wash cut across the road, angling upward and under a spread of stunted cedar. But high enough to drive the Ferrari under. I backed and pulled out over the rough rock, bouncing along, with the motor roaring. We got under the cedars and I cut the motor. While I stood there a low-flying plane came droning over. I got a glimpse of it and saw the Civil Air Patrol marking on it. That added up.

"They're looking for us with planes," I said.

"What'll we do?" she asked.

We looked at each other. "Stay here until dark," I said. "Then drive on without lights." I sat down on the ground and picked up a handful of pebbles and began tossing them at the car.

She got one of the suitcases out and on the ground. She opened it and she riffled through a bundle of bills, with a loose look on her face, almost a look of sensuality.

"It's money," I said and threw all my pebbles away.

She looked at me. "Yes. Everything will be all right."

"We've got no food," I said. "I don't know where we'll get any."

She fondled the money. "I'm not hungry," she said.

"You will be," I said angrily. "And I will, too."

She put the money away and shut the suitcase and crawled over to me. She put her arms around my neck. "Something will turn up."

"Yeah," I said. "A Boy Scout will come along with a full pack."

She tightened her arms around my neck. "I wish we were back like we were," she said. "Long, long ago."

I pushed her away. I lay back with my head on my arms and looked up through the cedar into the sky. It was the bluest sky I'd ever seen. There wasn't a cloud in sight. A soft, warm wind fanned my cheek. The world was a beautiful place but it was filled with ugliness and I had a feeling all the dirt was concentrated in me. I felt a burning contempt for myself. "I don't know why," I said, "I did it. I don't know why."

Her fingers were on my cheek. "A half a million," she said. "Who wouldn't?"

"A lot of people wouldn't," I said bitterly and wished I was one of them.

"Back east," she said, "there was the payoff. This is no different."

"There wasn't a murdered kid," I said. "There wasn't much killing, except those that deserved to die."

Her eyes clouded and her face twisted. "That was Ball," she cried softly. "I didn't know what he was doing, Mark, I swear it!"

"But after you saw all the dough," I said, "that changed things."

She nodded. "The payoff—what's so different?"

"It's different out here," I said, wishing that it were so. "I came out here to get away from it — and you. The cops here, most of them, are clean and straight. And here I was one who didn't have to worry nights. I felt good."

7.

Another plane came over after awhile. It was one of the air posse. The shadow of its wings fled over the earth and went on and the sound died in the distance. The sun crept toward the western horizon. The wind rose and brought bits of dust and sand. She crawled on the lee side of me and lay close to me to keep out of the wind. She said, "I wish we were like we were when we started. With nothing on our minds but each other."

I said nothing.

"I really loved you, Mark," she said. "You're the only man I ever loved."

"Shut up," I said. "You don't know anything about love."

"I'll shut up, but I do."

After awhile, she said, "I'm thirsty."

"Put a pebble in your mouth," I told her.

She put a pebble between her red lips and lay back down. She said, "Remember our trip —"

"Don't drag up that stuff," I said. I raised, listening for a moment and then lay back down. I looked at my watch. In about an hour it'd be dark. And we'd go on. To where, I wondered, with an inward desperation. Always running, always afraid.

"What're you thinking?" she asked.

"About being hunted," I said.

"Sort of a different business for you," she said.

I heard the sound again and sat up.

"What's the matter?"

"I thought I heard a car."

"You're hearing things," she said.

I lay back again. I felt the pressure on my coat pocket and I grabbed at it. I didn't get there in time. The black muzzle of the gun looked at me as she backed away from me on her knees and one hand. The gun didn't waver.

"Be careful, Mark," she said softly.

"Why?" I asked, thinking she could have picked a better time.

"I don't know," she said. "Maybe I've just learned something."

Her skin was smooth and clear. Her eyes were blue and clear, too. A little wisp of blonde hair waved in front of her eyes. She was beautiful. I let myself go for a moment. She was as beautiful as any woman I'd ever seen.

"What now?"

"Take out your handcuffs," she said. "Do it slow, Mark. Don't make me pull the trigger."

"All right," I said, and suddenly nothing made any difference any more. I wasn't mad, now. Just sort

of sick, as I handed her the cuffs.

She looked at me for a long speculative moment. "Put one of them on your wrist, Mark. Your right wrist."

I did as she told me.

She raised her head, listening intently.

I could hear it too, then. The sound of a motor, coming up the grade, beyond where the police car went over the edge of the road.

"Get over to the car, Mark. Hurry."

I came to my feet and walked over to the car.

"Here," she said. "By the rear wheel. Get down on your knees."

She stepped back and the hammer clicked on the pistol. "Kneel down, Mark," she said. "There by the wheel."

I said, "All right," and got down on my knees.

"Put the other cuff on the wire wheel," she said.

I did it and the snap of the lock was a metallic click that went all the way through me.

She stepped over and got my pistol out of the holster and threw it away. Then she said, "Listen for a moment. No matter what has happened, you're the only man I've ever loved."

She leaned close and for a moment her hair brushed my cheek. Then her lips were on mine. They were cold. She pulled away and went limping down the hill, toward the road.

The car was near now, the motor racing. Down below, I couldn't see her any longer. A moment later I heard a shot.

8.

Ortega came into sight first, running up the wash with a pistol in his hand. He stopped running when he saw me and came on at a walk. He knelt there beside me and unlocked the cuffs.

I stood up, rubbing my wrists. "Where is she?"

He jerked his head. "Down there," he said. "In the road, chief." His voice sounded tight. He looked at me in a funny way and kept on looking. I rubbed the back of my hand across my mouth and it came away red.

Steve Ortega turned to the suitcases and lifted them and started down toward the road while I stared at the red smear on the back of my hand.

I went down the dry wash, came out on the road and stood there for a moment. She lay in the middle of the road, her blonde hair lying in a vivid golden swirl about her shapely head. The blue steel pistol was in her right hand. The sheriff's deputies stood looking down at her.

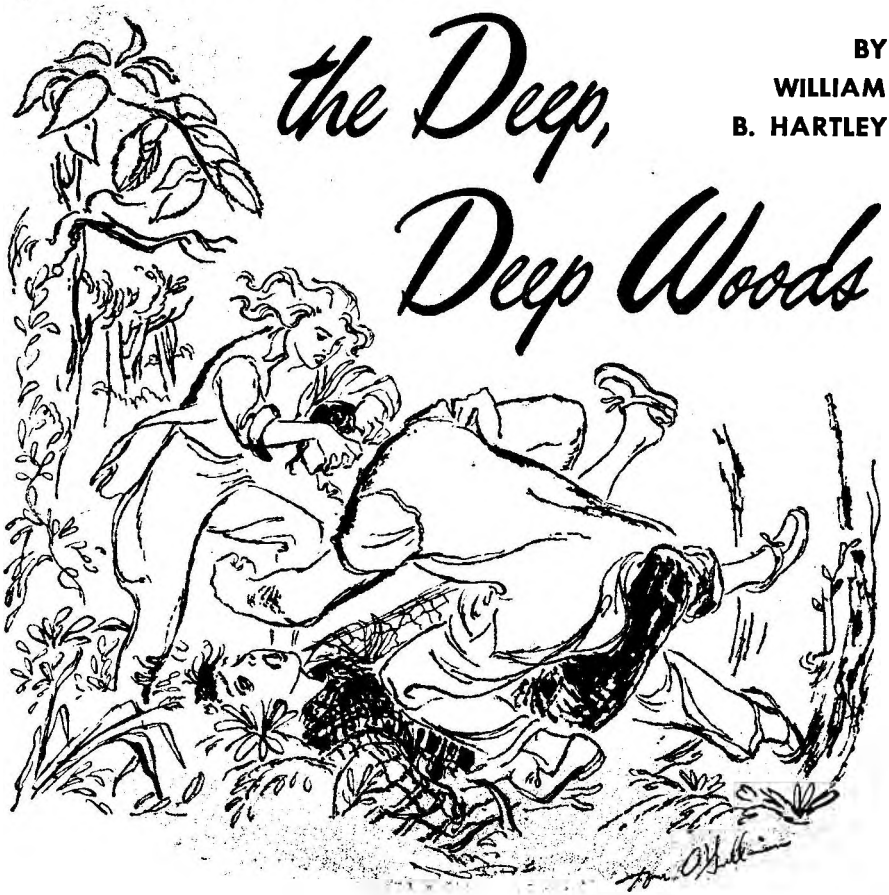
"Damn good looker," one of them said.

I kept my eyes straight ahead and didn't look as I passed. One of them spoke but I kept going. I got into the car and waited for the others.

Laura and the Deep, Deep Woods

Women were something sacred to Eddie, something special — until that August day when he found out what they were really like . . .

BY WILLIAM B. HARTLEY



THE WAY you learn about sex, it's funny. With some young boys, it's romantic and sweet and tender — as undramatic as a walk on the church green. With others, it can be violent. With me, it was violent.

It was very important to me, the way I learned about sex. I often think about it. I remember the hot earthy smell of the woods, and the shouting and screaming, and all the strange things that took place on that sunny August day. I remember

how I felt and what I did and also why I did it.

I was fourteen when I learned about sex — really *learned*, I mean. Oh, sure, I knew a little about it, but not really enough to add up to a row of pins. A kid like I was, he reads Robin Hood and King Arthur and all sorts of romantic books, and he gets an idea about women. He thinks they're something special — sacred vessels, the way the books say. He knows a good man always has to protect weak women against bad men. And that's about all he knows. It isn't much.

The way I learned about sex, I had this friend named Big Tom Waterman. Big Tom was a promoter. He was about six feet tall, with big shoulders and curly hair. His nose was all stove in from being hit by a canoe paddle down to the dance hall. That's over by the lake, you see.

Big Tom was twenty when I learned about sex. His old man had given him a young heifer which he had promoted into some pigs. Then he sold the pigs and bought three rowboats. He rented the boats to the summer people, and made enough to get ten rowboats. They all leaked through the nice gray paint.

Well, Tom found a sucker to buy the rowboats, and then he promoted himself three saddle horses. He rented them and what with one thing or another Tom got to have seven in the string. They were all pretty old, but Tom kept them curried so they looked young and glossy. The summer people couldn't tell the difference anyhow.

I helped Big Tom around the horse string. I curried and saddled up; I hauled feed and water; and sometimes, when the customer didn't know how to ride or was alone, I'd go along. I'd take Dolly, the best horse, and have a fine old time riding with the dudes. I sure liked horses.

It was wonderful around the horse string. Big Tom had rigged a poplar pole between two big elms. We kept the horses hitched there so people could see them from the road. When business was slow and the horses didn't need any work, we'd sit with our backs against one of the elms. We'd smoke and look up through the leaves at the bright summer sky. Sometimes we'd talk, sometimes we wouldn't. We'd drink watered whisky that Big Tom stole out of his old man's wood box. Tom figured his old man didn't have much imagination to hide whisky in a wood box.

Now that I'm grown and working in Mr. Gabe Cain's hardware store, I like to think of those afternoons.

Sometimes Laura Demarest would come over to hang around the horse string and bum rides. Laura was only seventeen, but she was big for her age. At seventeen, Laura had everything she was going to have at twenty.

Laura was how I got to learn about sex.

Laura was pretty, with bright yellow hair — what they call butter hair — and eyes that were big for her face. She didn't keep herself too good, though. Usually Laura wore ragged brown shorts and a dirty old shirt her brother had thrown away. She didn't wear anything underneath it, and you could tell. Laura went barefoot in the summer, so naturally her feet were always stained with dirt and grass.

"Tommy," she'd beg. "Aw, Big Tom, lemme have a ride!"

Tom would say, "Go home to your Ma, and wash your face."

But she'd keep on begging until Big Tom got tired of listening to her. He'd let her have a horse so she could ride across the back pasture and into the woods. There was an old wagon trace up there that made pretty good riding after we'd cleared out the low branches.

I always liked Laura because she was so pretty, even though her feet were dirty and scratched. I was old enough to notice about her shirt and the very nice legs that stuck out of her shorts.

On this day when I learned about sex, it was flaming hot. There wasn't much business because the summer people were around the lake, splashing and yelling and trying to get drowned. I guess they figured it was too hot to go riding, and they were more than half right.

Big Tom and I just sat under one of the elms, slurping ice water from a stone crock and smoking Bull Durham. The horses kept switching their tails at the flies and comparing whinnies. It was peaceful in the shade, the horses smelled good, and there was just enough breeze to make it bearable.

I saw this girl strolling down the road.

"Looks like trade," I told Big Tom.

The girl was dressed up real fancy with breeches and boots, a white blouse and a little red scarf around her neck. She had nice-looking yellow hair.

"I think I'll ride out with this one," Tom said. "Boy, take a look at that!"

Then we both gulped and stared at each other. The girl was Laura! Our Laura, all dolled up and pretty enough to set on a calendar.

"Hi," she said, like nothing was different.

"What in hell happened to you?" Tom demanded. "You gone crazy? Where'd you steal that stuff?"

"I didn't. I bought it."

"With what? Baby sitting?"

Laura didn't answer. She had moved around in back of the hitching rail and was stroking Dolly's neck. Tom and I just stared at her as if we hadn't known her all our born days. But what she did next told us she was the same old Laura.

"Tommy," she said. "Aw, Tommy, let me have a ride."

"Go home —" Big Tom started to say, and then stopped suddenly.

I guess he just couldn't turn the kid down, all dressed up that way. "Well, all right," he said. "You can take Dolly, but don't be out too long. Ed will saddle for you."

"Ed ain't saddling no free rides," I said. That's me. I'm Ed.

"Saddle Dolly," Big Tom told me. When he spoke like that, there wasn't any argument unless you wanted a fat lip. I saddled.

Laura rode off the way she always did, up across the pasture and into the woods. She looked pretty with her red scarf — hell, she looked beautiful. She sat a horse right smart, too, with a straight back and her elbows in. When she went into the woods, you could see that scarf and white blouse for quite a spell.

"If we had a good horse to show," Big Tom said, "damned if I wouldn't stick a derby on her and let her show it."

"She rides nice," I agreed. What I meant was that she looked cuter than hell.

"Yeah," Big Tom said. "Another year, and that one's going to give her old lady gray hairs. I don't know but what I wouldn't mind helping."

I didn't exactly understand what Big Tom meant, but I got the general idea. I can't say I liked it, on account of Robin Hood and King Arthur and everything. Laura, being a girl, was a sacred vessel. Besides — well, I guess I was sort of soft on Laura. I hadn't much wanted to admit it to myself, I guess, but I think I'd known that for quite a while.

Along about four o'clock a whole party of summer people came up to rent horses. There were six of them, so we had enough mounts, but they were awful dudes. Two of the women were wearing shorts. I hated to think how they'd feel after scraping on a saddle for an hour. One of the men, he was wearing pants and no shirt and a towel around his neck. That kind.

Big Tom took me aside. "I got to go out with these pigs," he said. "Otherwise somebody's sure to get hurt. You throw a saddle on Blackie and bring Laura back here. We got to have Dolly for me to ride."

I didn't mind going after Laura one little bit. So I rode through the pasture and into the woods. It was pretty up there. From the top of the hill, just where you went into the woods, you could look down on the lake. You could see little canoes and rowboats, and when a man slapped the water with a canoe paddle it took several seconds for the sound to come up.

The woods were quiet and sort of dappled. I let Blackie run and had a fine old time pounding along the trail. First I was a knight for King Arthur, and then I got to be a cowboy, and pretty soon I was a Canadian Mountie chasing his man. Only Laura sure didn't look like a man.

And then, at the edge of a clearing, I saw Dolly. She was tethered to a

birch tree, enjoying herself with some tufts of grass. There wasn't any sign of Laura.

I tied Blackie to the birch tree and walked back into the underbrush. It didn't take me long to find Laura. She was lying on the grass, her arms folded behind her head, looking up at the sky. She was sure pretty. Like I said before, she was only seventeen, but she had everything she was going to have at twenty. And lying there like that, with her arms up and all, you noticed it more than ever.

I went over and sat down beside her on the grass. She didn't say anything. She just glanced at me, not surprised at all, and then started looking up at the sky again. She had a funny little smile on her face, like maybe there was something up there that amused her.

I didn't say anything, either. I figured I should say something, but darned if I could think of what it ought to be. I got out my sack of Bull Durham and rolled a cigarette. But my mouth was real dry, for some reason, and the cigarette tasted bad. I threw it away and just sat there, staring at some bushes.

It's a funny thing, but all at once I began to notice that Laura smelled good. Not from perfume, like the dudes usually did, but just plain good. She smelled the way a pretty girl *ought* to smell, and I was willing to bet she didn't have a drop of perfume on her.

I reached up and rubbed the sweat off my forehead with the back of my hand, and then I sort of eased myself down on one elbow. which put me a lot closer to Laura, She didn't say a word, and neither did I. I don't think I could have, even if I could have thought of anything to say.

I bent my head down and kissed her, and for maybe a couple of seconds she kissed me back, and then she turned her head away and laughed a little. For some crazy reason, that only made me want to kiss her all the more. The first thing I knew, I had both my arms around her, but damned if I could kiss her again. She was kind of thrashing around on the grass, but not enough to get away from me, and every time I'd get close to her lips she'd twist her head away at the last second and I'd have to start over again.

Then all at once she flipped herself around to one side, and jumped up, and then she was running off through the underbrush like a scared deer, letting out little squeals with every step. I didn't want her to be scared like that, and I sure didn't want her to run away, so I yelled and started after her.

She'd almost reached the clearing where the horses were tethered when a man dived into view. He was a big man, one of the summer dudes who was always wandering around the woods taking pictures.

He looked at Laura, who'd just ripped her blouse halfway off on a

branch, and then he looked at me, and it wasn't any trouble at all to know what he'd be thinking. It was just what I or anybody else would have thought. He'd be thinking, *Here's a girl in trouble, her virtue is at stake, and I'm the guy that has to save her from a fate worse than death.*

He was pretty fast for such a big guy. Before I knew it, he was on top of me, beating the bejabbers out of me. He hit me with his fists. He hit me with his elbows. He kicked me. He tried to smash his head against my nose. In between times, he bit me.

I was so busy trying to stay alive that I didn't notice, at first, that someone else was in the fight right along with the big guy and me. The first I knew that Laura was trying to pull the guy off me was when I heard him let out an unholy yell and suddenly lose interest in me for a moment. Then I saw that Laura was behind him, scratching his neck and face with those long fingernails of hers. Boy, I'd never have believed that a girl's nails could do so much damage. There was blood all over the guy's neck and face, and when he tried to get up to defend himself from Laura, damned if she didn't haul off and kick him right in the face.

The big guy sat down hard, and then he got to his feet again and started toward us.

"You leave him alone!" Laura yelled. Then she flopped down on the grass beside me. "Aw, you hurt him!" she said. "You hurt little Eddie!"

That's exactly what she said.

This wasn't like what they did in the books. Laura should have been wrapped around the big guy, whispering, "My Hero! You Saved Me From a Fate Worse than Death!" And I should have been slinking off into the woods, maybe saying, "Curses!"

And there was Laura, wrapped around *me!*

The big guy was the one who slank off into the woods. He had the damnedest look on his scratched face I'd ever seen, and he kept muttering to himself until he was out of sight.

I lay there with my head in Laura's lap, while she talked baby talk to me and tried to get some of the blood off my face with a little handkerchief. I thought very hard. Pretty soon the answer came to me, and I knew I'd learned about sex.

Laura hadn't wanted to be saved from a fate worse than death! Hell, she hadn't had the slightest desire to be saved! And she had *wanted* to be chased!

Well, that's about it. That's how I learned about sex. I can't say the lesson did me any harm in later years.

Matter of fact, it did me quite a lot of good!

What's Your Verdict?

No. 3 — The Drinking Man

BY SAM ROSS

WHEN Paul Horgan began to be seen around town with Violet Smith, everybody was a little surprised. Paul had never been seen out with a girl before — anyhow, not more than once — and Violet somehow didn't seem like the kind of girl who'd take to a quiet, unassuming thirty-year-old guy with a low-paying job in a local jewelry store and a complete lack of taste for the higher life of town.

Frankly, Violet was more the kind of girl you'd expect to see hanging around a rich and balding banker, or a richer and balder Board Chairman. Not that she wasn't young and pretty — but it looked as if she were the kind of girl who'd be out for money and plenty of it. The townspeople wondered quite openly what she could see in Paul. Until it was too late, none of them hit on the right answer.

Violet saw possibilities in the humble little jeweler's assistant. With the right kind of guidance, he might provide an easy stepping-stone to higher things. After all, the stuff stacked away in that jewelry store ought to be worth $25,000 anyhow — and on $25,000 a girl could travel a long way.

Paul didn't need much persuasion. The taste of night-life Violet had provided had whetted his appetite, and besides, Paul had fallen very much in love with her. The vision of $25,000, shared between them, got to be a little too much. So, one night in Violet's apartment on the edge of town, he came to a decision. He was going to rob the jewelry store.

It wouldn't be very hard, he explained. He knew where the burglar-alarm was connected, and he knew that his boss, Mr. Roth, disconnected it from the outside every morning before he entered the store. He knew just how to get rid of that little inconvenience.

The police would be no trouble. If anyone should see Paul hanging around the jewelry store late at night, or even spot him coming in or going out of the place, it would look natural. After all, he worked there, didn't he? Nobody was going to ask any questions.

Paul, of course, knew where the

valuables were stored, and he knew how to get to them. He and Violet figured out a way to get rid of the loot out of town — Violet, conveniently, knew of a fence. There didn't seem to be a problem in the world. So they decided to go at the job the very next night.

When the time came, though, Paul began to get nervous. A little drink, he told Violet, would quiet his nerves. She had to agree, because Paul hadn't let her in on the location of the burglar alarm or the valuables. Paul wasn't quite that dumb. And Violet figured that, once she got her hands on the stuff, she could kiss Paul goodbye very easily. She might as well be nice to the guy while it didn't matter, she told herself.

So she and Paul went into a neighboring bar and Paul downed his one drink for courage. That one called for another, of course, and a third topped the first two.

It went on that way for some time, until Paul was thoroughly and completely blotto. As it turned out, though, this didn't impair either his memory or his delicate touch with the burglar alarm.

The job went off just as scheduled, and two hours after they'd entered the bar, Violet and Paul were speeding away in Violet's car, the loot stashed in the trunk compartment. Violet was driving, because Paul, by this time, was fast asleep. He wasn't used to liquor in quantity, and he'd had a good deal of it.

Violet planned to leave Paul in a strange city, where he'd be lost and confused and might spend some time getting acquainted with his surroundings before he realized he'd been had. This might gain Violet a few hours or even a full day.

But by the time they reached the city the police were waiting for them. It seems that someone *had* seen Paul and Violet leave the bar and break into the jewelry store, and had thought it looked suspicious. When he saw them drive away, he noted the direction they were heading and notified the home town cops — who sent out an alert to the towns through which Paul and Violet would pass.

Violet tried to make the best of things. First, she pointed out that she had had nothing to do with the robbery. The police checked with Paul and found out that Violet was lying. Paul was feeling much too hung over to make a stab at anything but the truth, that morning.

Then Violet got her bright idea. She remembered enough law to tell the cops that a drunken man wasn't responsible for his actions. It was obvious to everybody that Paul was drunk and must have been drunk when the robbery was committed. If he wasn't legally responsible for his actions, the worst the cops could do would be to reclaim the jewelry and maybe give Violet and Paul a lecture on why crime doesn't pay.

Violet tried it on the police. This angle stopped them. One cop insisted she was right, and there was nothing the law could do about her or her companion in crime. But another said that both Violet and Paul could be prosecuted, regardless of the drunkenness.

What's *your* verdict?

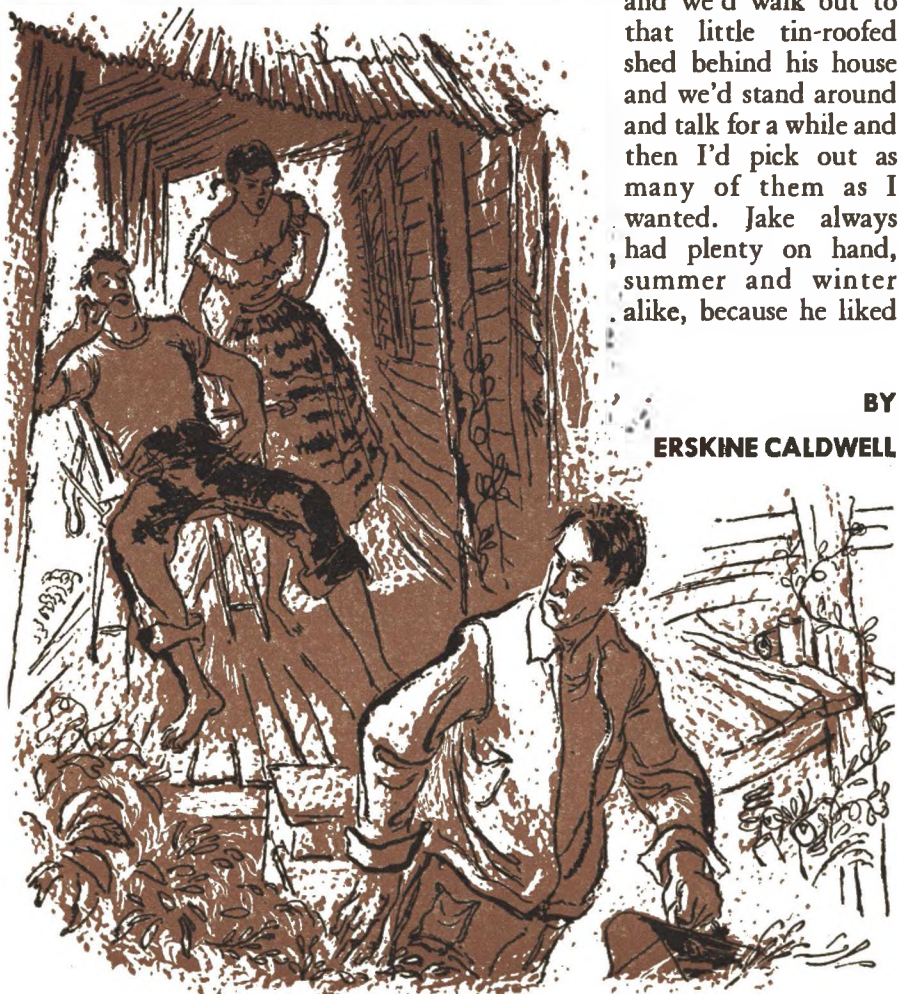
ANSWER:

Paul and Violet received long prison terms.

Violet just didn't know enough law. It's quite true that if a man commits an unpremeditated crime while drunk, he can't be subjected to the same punishment as a sober man, and he may be released completely without charges. But if a man plans a crime while sober, and then gets drunk during the commission of the crime, he can be tried and convicted regardless of the drunkenness. In this case, both

It wasn't so bad, having Oscar around. At least, not until he started all that fuss about soquots . . .

Second Cousin



FOR the past four or five years I've made it a practice to go down to Jake Upham's house every Thursday afternoon after work and get some soquots. I'd go down to Jake's and we'd walk out to that little tin-roofed shed behind his house and we'd stand around and talk for a while and then I'd pick out as many of them as I wanted. Jake always had plenty on hand, summer and winter alike, because he liked

BY

ERSKINE CALDWELL

them just as much as I did, and he'd always tell me to help myself to all I could carry.

Jake and I had been friendly like that ever since both of us moved to town to work in the stave mill, and if there was something of mine he wanted to use or borrow, I'd always tell him to go ahead and help himself. After I'd picked out the soquots, I'd bring them home and hand them over to my wife, Lorrie, and she'd get busy and fix them for us. I guess she liked them just as much as I did, because she always stood on the front porch and acted real pleased when she saw me bringing them home on Thursday afternoons.

Nobody's better than Lorrie when it comes to fixing soquots, and I got so I always looked forward to Thursday nights because I could count on Lorrie fixing all I wanted. If you've ever had soquots fixed just right, you know how good they can be.

Yesterday morning, though, which was a Thursday, and just when I was getting ready after breakfast to leave the house and go to work at the stave mill, Lorrie's cousin, Oscar Strude, who'd been staying at the house for the past month or longer, said he didn't like soquots and told Lorrie not to fix any more.

That made me mad.

There'd been bad blood building up between Oscar and me ever since he came to town and said he thought he'd stay a while. I don't mind kinfolks visiting one another from time to time, and maybe spending the night if they've come a long way, because there's nothing that'll give you a better inner feeling than sitting around with some of your kinfolks and speculating about some of the others who're missing. I like to visit kinfolks myself once in a while, but it's stretching kinship 'way too far when somebody moves in like Oscar Strude and just stays and stays and stays.

I was boiling mad in no time at all after Oscar'd said that about the soquots.

"If you don't like it here, why don't you move on someplace else?" I said to him. "You've been here longer than kinship calls for, anyhow."

"I didn't say I didn't like it here," Oscar told me. "I like it here better than anywhere else I know. What I said was that I don't like those queer things you bring here to the house every Thursday. Why can't you bring home some chickens or rabbits or fish while you're about it?"

"A man who don't like soquots ought to be taken out and shot," I told him.

"You can't talk like that to my kinfolks," Lorrie spoke up. "That's something I won't stand for, Pete Ellrod. I put up with what you say to me, but I won't stand for that kind of talk about a single one of my kith and kin."

"You wouldn't have to put up

with it," I told her, "if he'd pick himself up and get out of the house and stay out. I've been thinking about the way he hangs around here all the time, anyhow. It don't look good to me at all. He might be your second-cousin-once-removed, but I'd say that's stretching kinship 'way too far for any man's peace of mind."

"I'll invite Oscar to stay as long as he wants to," she said right away. "The day will never come when anybody can say that I put one of my kinfolks out of the house."

"If nobody else can say it, I sure can," I told her.

"If Oscar goes," she said right back, "I'm going, too."

"Going where?"

"Going off with him."

THAT stopped me right up short. I'd never heard Lorrie talk to me like that before in all the seven years we've been married and living together, and I just didn't know what to make of it. I'd come to take it for granted that my ways suited her, and I knew her ways suited me, and in the past when some little something went wrong, we'd have words, but we'd always made up soon after with no lingering hard feelings. But that was before Oscar Strude came along.

Things had been taking a different turn ever since he moved in, and even a blind man could see which way things went. I'd made allowances for Lorrie's turning a man's head now and then, because with all her good looks it was to be expected, but I'd never made allowance for a somebody like Oscar Strude.

When Lorrie told me in the beginning that he was her second-cousin-once-removed, it sounded a little peculiar to me, because there ought to be a limit somewhere to how far kinship stretches, but I knew how much store she put in kinship, and I just kept quiet about it at the time. Oscar had been off in the army for two or three years, and he said he was just taking his time looking around and getting the feel of things before he settled down somewhere and went to work.

If there was one thing I hoped for more than anything else all that time, it was that the army would be sorry it let him go, and would come and get him and send him off to the other side of the world again.

"The trouble with you, Pete," Oscar said to me, "is that you think you can run all of creation the exact way you want it run. It's time you found out that you're not the only human being in this world, and that millions of other people have rights, too. It's people like you who've got to wake up and realize that a man can't live a selfish life in this day and time."

"Now," Lorrie said, nodding her head up and down and showing how much she took up for Oscar, "you can make up your mind here and now, Pete Ellrod. What are you going to do about it?"

I'd never been so baffled before in all my life.

"That's a peculiar way for you to talk, Lorrie," I said to her. "What in the world's got into you, anyhow? First you side with Oscar when he says he don't like soquots, and then you say you'll leave and go off with him if I put him out of the house. Don't I count any more at all?"

"No," she said, shaking her finger at me like she always does when she's set on having her own way. "Not when you say you'll put my kinfolks out of the house. My kinfolks can stay and visit me as long as they please."

"But that one there don't work a lick," I tried to tell her. "He don't do a blessed thing but hang around the house all the time eating up the meals and wearing out the bed. I'm the one who goes to work at the mill every day and earns all the money that's spent. Looks to me like I'd have the right to say who eats and sleeps in my own house. Besides that," I told her, "it don't please me one bit to having him staying here in the house with you all day while I'm off at work in the mill."

"You'd better shake a leg and get to work now," Oscar said, laughing about it, "or you'll be late punching in and they'll chop off some of your pay."

It was getting late, and I knew it. I found my hat and hurried down to the stave mill. I finally got there just in time to go on the eight-thirty shift.

All morning long I thought about what Lorrie and Oscar had said, and it got me so worried I could hardly do my work. The foreman, Stan Manley, came by in midafternoon and asked what was troubling me. Stan knew I was worried about something, because my lathe kept on getting jammed up and I'd have to pull the switch and clean it out every once in a while. At first I wasn't going to tell him, because everybody knows how private matters, once they are made known, can get gossiped about from one end of the mill to the other, but I knew I had to talk to somebody about my worries, and so I went ahead and told him about Lorrie and Oscar Strude.

"Looks to me like your wife's cousin just don't like soquots," Stan said, laughing a little. "I've heard it said that a lot of people have to learn to like them, just like some folks have to learn to like oysters."

"There's one thing for sure in this world I'm not going to do," I told him, "and that's learning Oscar Strude to like soquots."

"Well, Pete," he said with a serious look, "a simple little thing like that might make all the difference in the world. A man has to do some peculiar things every now and then to please his wife and keep her satisfied. I can see how there'd be people in the world who don't like soquots. When you stop and think about it, there even may be people in the world who've never seen soquots or

handled them, much less know what they are or where they come from. If your wife's cousin spent most of his life back up there in those Big Smoky hills, he might never get accustomed to the way we live down here."

"He came from the Big Smoky country," I told Stan, "but there's more to it than that. Any blind man could see that, Stan."

"Maybe you're right, Pete," he admitted, sitting down on the bench and thinking for a while. Presently he looked up at me and nodded. "There could be a heap more to it than that, Pete, just like you said. What cousin does he claim to be to her? First, scond, or third?"

"Second-cousin-once-removed."

"That's bad," Stan said, shaking his head.

"Why's it bad?"

"Because it's close enough kin for one thing today, and far enough removed for another thing tomorrow. You'd better punch out and quit work for the day and go home now. That's the wise thing for you to do under the circumstances. I've always found that it's a lot smarter to have a showdown with my wife in the daytime than it is after dark. Somehow it makes a big difference in the outcome."

I LEFT the mill right away and hurried home. Lorrie was sitting in the big chair crying.

"What's the matter, Lorrie?" I asked her.

"Oscar's gone!" she said, crying more.

"Gone where?"

"Gone for good!"

"Well, that's sure taking a little hint in a big hurry," I said, feeling pleased about it. "From the way he talked this morning, I feared he was going to stay forever and a day. What made him leave in such a great hurry?"

"He said I was siding with you."

"How did that come about, Lorrie?"

"He asked me what soquots were, and I told him I didn't know exactly and that he'd have to ask you. That's when he said I was siding with you. Then he packed up and left."

I knew right away that the best thing that ever happened to me was Lorrie's not knowing what soquots were, because if she had known, and had told Oscar, they wouldn't have had that falling-out, and he would still be there eating up meals and wearing out the bed. As it was, now she'd have to quit boasting about Oscar being her second-cousin-once-removed and using that as an excuse. From then on he was going to be her second-cousin-far-removed. I had peace of mind come over me for the first time in more than a month.

I pulled up a chair and gave her a big hug.

"Now, Pete —" she said, wiping away the tears.

I moved closer and kissed her good.

"Lorrie, are you real sure you

don't know what soquots are?" I asked her after a while.

"Pete, I never did know what they were, exactly," she said, looking straight at me in a convincing way. "I always meant to ask you, but somehow I just never did."

"Lorrie, do you want me to tell you now what they are?" I asked her.

"No," she said, shaking her head to let me know she meant it. "I don't want to know what they are, Pete. It'll be a big help if anybody ever asks me again."

I sat there in the chair feeling good all over, because I knew if anybody else, kinfolks or no kinfolks, ever came around and asked her what soquots were, I wouldn't have to worry for a single minute. I was satisfied that was going to give me peace of mind for a long time to come.

Love Affair

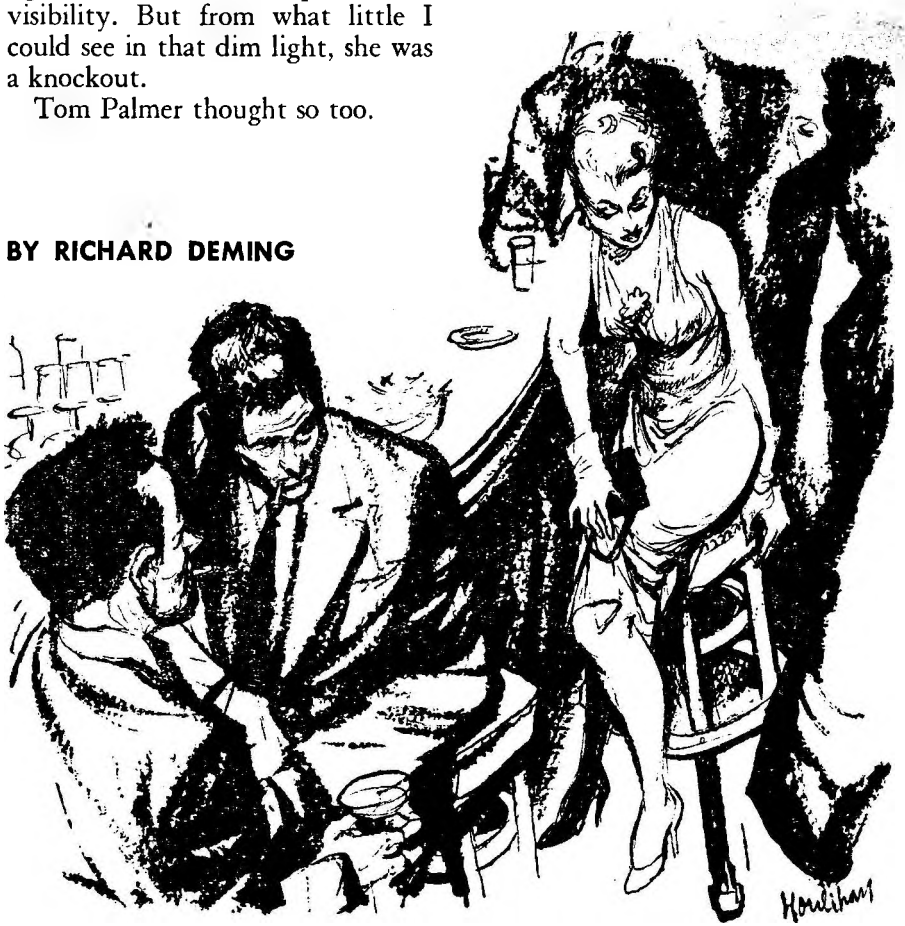
Geraldine Stoyle was beautiful — too beautiful. The two cops wondered if she knew what kind of a bar she was in.

I NEVER really got a good look at Geraldine Stoyle because the lighting at the Purple Dragon is designed to create atmosphere, not visibility. But from what little I could see in that dim light, she was a knockout.

Tom Palmer thought so too.

Tom and I were standing at the bar when she walked in, five minutes before barroom curfew. We didn't know her name then, of course, be-

BY RICHARD DEMING



cause neither of us had ever seen her before. All we knew was that the loveliest blonde vision we had ever seen was taking the bar stool next to Tom.

Farther along the bar two women who looked like they'd welcome being picked up stared at her with resentment. I couldn't blame them. The Purple Dragon has a reputation as a pickup spot, and I guess competition among the regulars is tough enough. With Geraldine in the place the other women looked like a bunch of hags even under the subdued and glamorizing light.

Tom didn't notice the evil eye she was getting. He didn't notice anything but the blonde. She was tall and willowy and had a figure that would have made her a fortune in burlesque if it was even half as nice undraped as it was when covered with clothes. The light was too dim to tell her exact age, but I got the impression that her complexion was smooth and creamy white. To top it, her hair was a soft blonde halo that hung to her shoulders.

Apparently she wasn't a regular customer because the bartender didn't seem to know her. As she ordered a whisky highball, I wondered if she knew what kind of a joint she was in.

Tom seemed to be wondering that too, because he glanced at me and raised an eyebrow. I shrugged.

Since she paid no attention to either of us, I doubt that Tom would have gotten into conversation with her if a female queer sitting at one of the tables hadn't decided to try her luck. You get them in places like the Purple Dragon once in a while, where a lot of women on the make hang out.

This one was typical . . . stocky and middle-aged, with a mannish haircut and dressed in a severely tailored suit. Drifting over to the bar, she took the stool the other side of the blonde and deliberately gave her the eye.

The blonde glanced at her in surprise. Then, when the stocky woman continued to look her over, her expression grew uncomfortable. Tom's face reddened.

Tom has a rather unreasonable attitude toward queers. I figure guys who would prefer to be girls, or girls who would prefer to be men are sick in the head, and I'm inclined to feel sorry for them instead of mad at them. But they make Tom see red. More than once I've had to grab his arm to keep him from clouting some dainty young fellow who started batting his eyelids like a woman. And though he's never offered to hit one, he hasn't any more use for female queers than he has for male ones.

Leaning forward, he said to the stocky woman in a flat voice, "On your way, babe."

The woman gave him an indignant look. Then, when she saw the uncompromising expression in his eyes, she put her nose in the air and returned to her table.

The blonde looked confused.

"What was that for?" she asked Tom.

He didn't want to tell her the stocky woman was a queer. Instead he just said, "You don't want to get tangled up with her."

When the blonde continued to look confused, he said, "This isn't a very nice joint. You don't look the sort of girl who ought to be in here at all."

She stared at him wide-eyed. Finally she managed to say in an embarrassed voice, "I . . . I was visiting a friend up the street. I'm not familiar with this end of town."

"Joe and I know it inside out," Tom said. He indicated me. "This is Joe Watkins. And I'm Tom Palmer. Daytimes we're cops, but evenings we're barflies. Could we show you some decent bars around here?"

She pointed to the clock over the bar, which showed one minute to closing time. Tom squinted at it ruefully.

"How about a nightcap here then?" he suggested.

She considered Tom's six feet two of solid muscle, his lean face with its white grin, and she smiled.

"I guess if a girl's going to get picked up in a strange bar, she couldn't find a safer pickup than a policeman," she said.

She hadn't even glanced at me.

We didn't learn much about her that night, I now realize in looking back. Over our nightcaps she told us her name was Geraldine Stoyle and she was a dress model for Blake and Crosby. But aside from that she didn't drop a bit of information.

On the other hand she managed to get Tom to unload his life history. By the time the bartender began flicking the lights on and off in signal that he wanted to close up, she knew he was a bachelor, was thirty years old, bunked with me and earned seventy-nine fifty a week as a detective second grade on the homicide squad.

But she didn't ask me a thing.

When Tom asked her if we could take her home, she seemed a little dubious, but after giving him another considering look, she agreed. She lived alone in an apartment over on West Plant. It was in a respectable middle-class neighborhood, and apparently she was just as respectable as the neighborhood, because she was very definite about not inviting us in for a drink when Tom dropped a hint that we could use one.

"Maybe next time," she said. "I appreciate the ride, but I'm really not in the habit of inviting strange men home at one-thirty in the morning."

Tom nodded as though the information pleased him. By now he had developed a fatuous look about the eyes that made me begin to regret we had ever run into the blonde Geraldine.

When we drove away, as far as I was concerned we were driving out of the blonde's life. Not that I had anything against her. I didn't know her well enough to have anything

against her. Which is probably why I was so willing to dismiss her from my mind. You run into a good-looking babe in a bar, take her home and she either invites you in or doesn't. If she doesn't, why bother any more? The bars are full of good-looking babes.

Usually Tom feels the same way about romance. But this time he fooled me.

All the next day he kept talking about Geraldine Stoyle until I felt like telling him to go soak his head. Tom likes his women as well as the next guy, but this was the first time I ever heard him yammer about one like a moon-struck kid. Usually he keeps relations on the same casual basis I do.

"You don't even know what the dame looks like," I told him.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Under that lighting at the Purple Dragon everybody looks glamorous. She may be a grandmother. Wait'll you see her in sunlight before you go off your rocker."

His only comment was, "Nuts."

For the next two weeks I was treated to the degrading spectacle of a grown man gradually going nuts over a woman he hardly knew. And the worst of it was the whole romance took place by telephone, with me listening to Tom's end of the conversation.

Every night Tom phoned her the minute we got back to the apartment, and every night was the same: she was busy, but please call again.

After a week of this I said to him, "She's trying to give you the brush-off, you baboon. Can't you take a hint?"

"She is not!" he told me hotly. "She went out of her way to let me know she wasn't, because she was afraid I might get that idea. I think she's involved with some guy she's trying to shake. She almost begged me not to stop calling. And she promised me we'd get together before long."

A second week passed without them getting together, but the phone conversations grew hotter by the day. Tom used to repeat to me what she said.

"I can't figure her," he said. "It's almost like she's deliberately trying to work me up before she sees me. Remember how stand-offish she was that night? Wouldn't even let us in for a drink. But every time I talk to her she lets down the bars a little more. Maybe I'm reading her wrong, but I get the impression she's hinting anything at all is going to go when we finally get together."

The next night the phone conversation left him practically punch drunk. When he hung up, he stared at me with his mouth open for nearly a minute before he spoke.

Then he said, "Holy cow! I finally got a date."

"Good," I told him. "Hope you get a million more. Maybe if you can get enough of this babe, you'll come back to earth."

"But that's not all," he said in a

dazed voice. "We're not going out. We're just staying at her place."

"So?" I asked.

"I've only seen the girl once. Who ever heard of making a woman over the telephone?"

"You haven't made her yet," I said.

"Oh no? Then why do you figure she told me to bring pajamas?"

He was out all that night, not even coming home before he reported to work.

He didn't mention Geraldine. In the middle of the morning I brought up the subject myself.

"How was your date?" I asked.

"All right," he said noncommittally.

His indifferent tone puzzled me, but if he didn't want to talk about it, that was his business. I let it ride.

He didn't make any more phone calls. And all at once he was his old self again, wanting to hit the bars with me evenings instead of staying home mooning about Geraldine. At first I was relieved to see him snap back to normal, but after a few days my curiosity got the best of me.

"What happened between you and Geraldine?" I asked one evening.

He gave me a peculiar look. Then he shrugged and said, "I guess you were right. About the dim lights at the Purple Dragon, I mean."

So Geraldine hadn't been as beautiful as she'd seemed at first meeting, I thought. I was a little surprised because she'd impressed me as a real knockout. But it's true that dim lights cover a lot of feminine defects. I figured that under the glare of normal home lighting he'd discovered a few wrinkles he hadn't been able to detect at the Purple Dragon. Maybe, as I'd facetiously suggested, she actually was a grandmother.

Tom's tone didn't invite further discussion. It was the one he adopts when he wants a subject dropped, and nice a guy as he is, he can work up a vile temper if he thinks somebody's poking a nose in his business.

So I dropped the subject.

It was about a week after this conversation that Tom and I drew a floater case. I hate floaters. Almost always they're tough to identify, and even after an identification half the time there's no physical evidence as to whether death was by accident, suicide or murder. On top of that, they're not very pretty to look at.

This one had been in the water about two weeks, which made it even less pretty than the usual run. The body was so discolored and so puffed out of shape, about all you could tell about it was that it was a man.

But in this case at least there was some indication that it hadn't been accident or suicide. In the first place the body was stark naked. And in the second there weren't any fingerprints because the tips of all ten fingers had been snipped off with some such implement as heavy shears or tin snips.

Except for running a routine check

of the missing persons file, there wasn't much we could do until both the coroner's physician and an undertaker completed their work. And between them they took three days.

On the third day a clerk brought the post mortem report into the homicide office. Tom barely glanced at it before tossing it over to me. Being a slow reader, it took me longer to look it over.

I noted that death had been from strangulation instead of drowning, which didn't particularly surprise me. Since I had never heard of a suicide snipping off his fingertips before jumping in the river, I had assumed it was murder from the beginning.

The report also showed the body was that of a male white man about twenty-five years old. And, oddly enough for that age, a totally bald man.

I said to Tom, "Let's walk over to the morgue and view the results of the embalmer's art."

The undertaker had done a good job. The body was no longer a bloated monstrosity, but had been restored to at least approximately what the man must have looked like in life. The dead man was slim and not very muscular, with sensitive features and rather full lips. After looking at him for a few moments, I glanced at the undertaker, who was still packing his embalming equipment.

"What the hell happened to his eyebrows?" I asked.

The undertaker shrugged. "Didn't have any. The guy was absolutely hairless. No hair, no beard. He hasn't even got any under his arms."

I turned to Tom and found him examining the corpse with a moody expression on his face.

"What now?" I asked. "He doesn't look like anything listed by missing persons."

"Photographs, I guess," Tom said indifferently.

So we had some pictures taken for circulation. But it came to nothing. Even publication of the dead man's picture in the papers failed to bring any response.

There isn't much you can do with a homicide investigation when your only clue is an unidentified body. After a week of no leads whatever, we released the body to the med school and stuck the case in the open file.

But it continued to stay in my mind. From the moment I had first seen the body after the undertaker finished restoring it, I kept feeling I had seen the man's face somewhere before. Where, I couldn't decide, but the feeling haunted me enough so that I couldn't get it out of my mind.

Now that two weeks have passed since Tom and I stuck the case in the open file, it just suddenly hit me why the man looked so familiar. And now I can't decide whether to leave well enough alone, or dig until I find out something I don't want to know.

Maybe I'd feel better if I dug just enough to satisfy myself I'm wrong. If I called at Geraldine Stoyle's apartment some night and the girl came to the door, I could forget the thing with a clear conscience after mumbling some excuse for calling on her.

But suppose instead there was no answer, the apartment was dark and I found some evidence such as accumulated mail or newspapers indicating she hadn't been home in some time?

Do I really want to know whether or not she's missing?

I don't think I do. It's probably only a wild hunch anyway, and I'd probably feel as guilty about suspecting my best friend if it turned out to be a false alarm as I do about the possibility of letting him get away with murder.

But I can't help thinking about how effeminate that hairless dead body was, and how small and delicate its features were. And about what a deep loathing Tom has for queers. And how steamed up he was the night he took off for Geraldine Stoyle's apartment.

And how much that bald-headed dead man resembled the beautiful Geraldine.

Charlie was a good gunman, and he didn't mind shooting a man at all. But, he insisted, he wasn't a

Lady Killer

BY RICHARD MARSTEN

MANELLI flicked the long ash from his cigar. The ash trickled down the front of his expensive suit, and he brushed at it idly, and I saw the pink tint of his manicure, and then his grey eyes pinned me solidly, and the mouth under his mustache moved.

"Do you, or don't you hire your gun?"

"I hire it," I said.

"Then what's your beef?" He inhaled deeply on the cigar, and he blew a nonchalant ring at the ceiling. The ceiling was sound-proofed, the way the rest of the room was, and I watched the smoke ring drift up toward the perforated boards, and then I brought my eyes back to Manelli's face.

"I don't kill women," I said.

"You draw the line, huh?" Manelli smiled thinly. "You got principles, huh?"

"I didn't say that."

"What did you say?" Manelli snapped. "You're telling me you don't want the job because it's a dame. I want to know what the hell's the difference between a dame and a guy."

"There's a lot of difference," I said. I smiled. "You know there's a difference."

"I didn't know you were a gag writer," Manelli said. "I thought you were a gun. I don't need humorous guns." He sucked in on the cigar again. "What do you say? Yes or no?"

"No."

"There's five g's involved in this little deal, you know that?"

"I know that."

"You couldn't use five g's, I guess."

"I can use it. You know goddamn well I can use it."

"Then do the job for me. If you don't do it, somebody else will. You might just as well collect the five." He paused. "Be sensible, Chuckie . . ."

"Don't call me 'Chuckie.' "

"All right, be sensible. What the hell you want me to call you? Charles? All right, Charles, this dame is going to get it, no matter who does it. She starts singing, and goodbye Manelli, and I'm not ready to say goodbye yet. So, if you're smart, you'll grab the five. Otherwise, some slob'll do the job, and the dame winds up in the river, anyway. What do you say?"

"Who's the dame?"

"What difference does it make?"

"I'd like to know."

"Her name is Iris." Manelli studied my face. "Iris Conway."

"Wasn't she . . ."

"She was," Manelli said. "For a long time. I picked her up out of the gutter, and I gave her things she never knew existed."

"What'd she give *you?*" I asked wrily.

"She gave me what she was giving everybody else anyway. Trouble is, she learned a lot while she was . . . sharing the apartment. She's threatened to sing unless I make it worth her while."

"I take it she's asking a hell of a lot more than five grand."

"A hell of a lot more," Manelli said, nodding. "Chuckie, you'll be doing me a big personal favor if you take this job. I mean, aside from the loot, it'll give me a lot of personal satisfaction."

"Five grand, huh?"

"Five grand. You do a nice job, maybe we'll go up to six, maybe seven. Depends on how things are running that week, and on whether or not you do a nice job." Manelli put his cigar in the ash tray. "I know you'll do a nice job, if you take it on. What do you say?"

"All right," I said.

Manelli smiled and rubbed his hands together. "Good, good. Now here's the setup . . ."

The apartment was a real swank one, with a battery of doormen, switchboard operators, and elevator runners. I gave my name to the switchboard, and the guy there dialed Iris Conway's apartment, told her the story, and then listened.

"She doesn't know you," he said drily.

"Tell her I'm here for Mr. Manelli," I said.

The guy passed on the information, listened, nodded, and said, "Go right up. 12C."

"Thanks."

The elevator took me up to the twelfth floor. When I stepped out of the car, I began looking for apartment 12C. I didn't have to look very long. A door at the end

of the hallway was open, and Iris Conway was standing in it.

"Mr. Rawlings?" she asked.

"Yes," I said.

"Come in."

She was wearing what I guess you call lounging slacks. The kind that hug the waist and then follow the outline of thigh and leg, a sort of pegged pants for women, tightening just below the knee, and ending there. She also had on a silk blouse with a deeply slit neck, and a choker with green stones in it was around her throat. I guessed the stones were emeralds, but I didn't ask. She stood in the doorway so that I had to squeeze past her, and then she followed me into the living room, and we both sat. I sat first, and then she bent over to sit, and the front of her blouse fell clear, and I saw the firm cones of her breasts in a tight black brassiere. She looked up suddenly, smiling, and one eyebrow arched up onto her forehead. The stones in the choker matched her eyes, and the white of her blouse matched her skin. She should have been wearing rubies somewhere to pick up the color of her lips.

"Has George agreed to my proposal?" she asked. George was Manelli, and he had done anything but agree to her proposal.

"The money you want, you mean?"

"If we're going to get crude . . . yes."

"No, he hasn't agreed. In fact . . ."

"Would you care for a drink, Mr. Rawlings?"

"In fact, he's hired me to kill you."

She was silent for a moment. She grinned then, and said, "Can I get you a drink anyway?"

"Scotch," I said.

She pushed herself off the long, low couch, and I saw that filmy brassiere again. I watched her walk across the room, watched the way the slacks clung to every line of her body. I thought of that body in Manelli's arms, and the thought wasn't a pleasant one.

"Is it safe to turn my back on you?" she asked teasingly.

"Oh, yes. Quite," I said. She was at the bar now, pouring from a fifth of pinch bottle.

"Soda?"

"Water," I said.

"That means going into the kitchen. Aren't you afraid I'll come back with a shotgun?"

I shrugged. "I'll take that chance."

She turned and smiled archly, and then she went into the kitchen, exaggerating the swing of her hips, as if they needed exaggeration. When she came back with the water glass, she brought everything over to the coffee table, and then lifted her own drink.

"To my demise?" she asked.

"To success," I said.

We drank.

"You don't seem very businesslike about this, Mr. Rawlings."

"Charlie," I said. "I'm not very businesslike. You don't seem very frightened."

"I'm not."

"Then that makes us even."

"Are you going to kill me right now?"

"I'm not sure I'll kill you at all," I said, watching her face. Nothing crossed that face. It remained expressionless, calm.

I waited for her to say something. When she didn't, I asked, "How much do you know about Manelli's operation?"

"Everything," she said. "Enough to put him behind bars for . . ."

"I don't care about that angle. Do you know enough to run it?"

"Run it?"

"The operation. Are you familiar enough with . . ."

"Oh, I see what you mean. Yes, I think so."

"You think so? Can you or can't you?"

"I can." She looked at me curiously. "I'm not sure I follow you."

"Then listen. My name is Charles Rawlings, and the name is synonymous with .45. It's a name hoods are afraid of. They know I do a neat job, and they know I do a quick job, and there's not a punk from here to Chi who doesn't sweat a little when he hears that name."

"So?"

"So Manelli offered me five g's to cool you. I cool you, and he lives happily ever after, pocketing the hundred g's or more that he brings in every week, or every month, or whatever. It doesn't make good addition."

"No," she said slowly, "it doesn't."

"You know the operation. A dame can't hold down the top spot because who'd take orders from a dame? With me, it's different. They'd take orders from me because they know my gun."

"What's your plan?"

"We turn the tables on Manelli. He's the one who gets cooled."

"And then what?"

"Then we step in. A partnership." I paused. "Just where Manelli left off." I paused again. "How does it fit?"

She moved a little closer on the couch. "I'm trying it on," she said softly.

"All right, try this on, too. I want all the figures, all the names, a basic plan of the layout and the take and everything."

"Why?" she asked suspiciously.

"Because I've got to move in as soon as Manelli is done with. And I've got to seem like I know the business, or at least enough of it to take immediate control. After that, you can fill me in whenever it's needed." I smiled. "Partners."

She reached up with one hand and touched my face. "You're very smart," she said.

"Yes or no?"

She made herself very comfortable before answering. She stretched her

long legs out on the couch, and she showed me her back, and then she leaned into my arms, and her lips touched mine.

"Yes," she said. "Yes."

We spent the next week filling me in on the setup. It was a complicated one, but I knew what I wanted, and I studied it hard. I called Manelli from time to time, telling him I was playing this one slowly because I wanted it to be a good job, and a clean one. He knew my rep, and so he strung along with me. At the end of a week, I had everything I needed, and then I made the big plan.

"You call Manelli," I told Iris. "You call him and tell him to get to your place on the double or you'll spill everything you know. When he gets here, I'll take care of him."

"Why here?" she asked.

"Why not? I'll get rid of him later, don't worry. And then we'll be ready to move in."

"All right," she said. Before I cut out for my own pad, I warned her to give me time to get home before calling Manelli. I lifted her chin and I kissed her on the mouth, thinking she had a lot to offer, but thinking also of the other dames I'd known, dames who'd also had a lot to offer.

"Are you nervous?" I asked.

"A little."

"Do you have a gun?"

"Yes."

"Where is it?"

She walked to the dresser drawer in her bedroom, taking out a small .32. She brought it to me, and I checked the load.

"Keep it in your purse when Manelli's here," I said.

"Why?"

"Honey, you never know what the hell's going to happen. I may need backing."

"All right," she said dubiously.

"Have him here at eight, okay?"

"Okay," she said.

"I'll be here at seven-thirty."

"All right."

I kissed her again, and then I left.

Manelli's call came at six-thirty.

"Chuckie?" he said.

"Yeah."

"I just got a call from Iris. She wants me to go to her place, alone. Says she'll spill if I don't show. Goddamnit, why haven't you . . ."

"What do you mean, spill?"

"Just that. She'll go to the cops. What do you make of it?"

"She's probably getting desperate. Go see her. Tell her to stuff it. Tell her to go to the cops, who cares? When she leaves, I'll be waiting for her downstairs."

"You'll do it tonight?"

"Tonight," I said. "What time does she want you there?"

"Eight," Manelli said.

"Get there at eight on the dot. Hear her out. Make sure she goes to the cops by eight-thirty. I'll be waiting."

"All right, Chuckie. Good luck."

"Don't worry," I said. I smiled and hung up.

I got to Iris' apartment at seven-thirty. She kissed me desperately, not because she wanted to be kissed but because she was a little nervous about what was coming. I made sure she had the .32 in her purse, and then I checked the load in my .45 and went into the bedroom at about five minutes to eight.

Manelli showed at eight on the dot.

She took him into the living room, sat him down in an easy chair, and then said, "I'm glad you came, George."

"What's on your mind?" Manelli asked.

I came out of the bedroom then. "Hello, Manelli," I said, smiling. He looked up at me, surprised, and then he looked over to Iris, and then his brow creased in a hundred places. I knew Manelli didn't carry a gun. Manelli had long passed the days when he needed to carry a gun. Manelli hired guys like me to carry the guns now. Maybe that's why he was frowning now.

"Chuckie," he said. "What are you . . ."

"Do you know any prayers, Manelli?" I asked.

He got the picture then, clear and fast. He got up out of the chair, and started to make a beeline for the door, just as the .45 snaked out of my shoulder holster. I aimed at his back, just the way I'd planned it, and then I squeezed the trigger and nothing happened. I squeezed again, and nothing happened again, and I turned to Iris desperately, the way I'd practiced it in the mirror a dozen times.

"Iris!" I shouted, "I'm jammed. The .32!"

Manelli was almost at the door now. I saw Iris reach for her purse, and then the .32 was in her hands. She knew what would happen if Manelli got out of the apartment. She knew he was carrying a death warrant in his pocket, and I counted on her knowing that, and I counted on the urgency the knowledge would give the situation. The .32 was in her hand now. Manelli was scrabbling at the door lock, his body trembling, knowing a gun was trained at his back.

"Shoot!" I yelled. "Shoot, Iris, for Christ's sake, shoot!"

She fired. She fired once, and the slug tore up six inches of door jamb, missing Manelli completely.

"Shoot!" I kept yelling, and her knuckle went white on the trigger of the .32, and then the gun was leaping in her hand, and she had the range now, and the slugs tore into Manelli's back. He clawed at the door, trying to hold himself up, and then he toppled to the carpet. I went over to him quickly.

Iris was staring at the empty gun in her fist. "Is he . . . is he . . ."

"He's dead," I said.

She began sobbing wildly.

"Charlie, Charlie, what happened? Your gun . . . did it . . . was it jammed?"

I still had the .45 in my hand. I trained it at her, and I flicked my thumb and said, "No, I just didn't take the safety off."

She stared at me, confused, for just a moment.

"You shouldn't have killed him, honey," I said. "Even if he did throw you over, you shouldn't have killed him." I looked at her steadily and calmly now.

"What?" She opened her eyes wide, incredulously. "*What!*"

I walked to the phone and lifted the receiver. There was a lot I had to do now. I had to get a million dollar enterprise in order, and then I had to see about dames, lots of dames, all sizes and all shapes. I looked again at Iris Conway, the disbelief still all over her face, the useless gun in her fist.

"Give me the police," I said, and then a little while later I said, "I want to report a murder."

The Dead Darling

Sergeant Selby had collected a lot of suspects — so many that it looked as if he was making a career out of one murder case.

A Novelette

BY JONATHAN CRAIG

IT WAS pretty much like a thousand other basement apartments in Greenwich Village, except that it seemed to have a few more African war masks than was usual and maybe a few more nudes on the stucco walls. The walls themselves were a dark orange, and a couple of yellow mobiles revolved lazily against the deep purple ceiling.

I relit my cigar and studied the girl on the studio couch across from me. From out in the kitchen I could hear Stan Rayder's voice as he talked with the assistant M.E. and the boys from the lab. I thought I could still smell the gas a little, but it could have been just my imagination.

"It's all so wrong, somehow," the girl said. She was about twenty, dark-haired and blue-eyed and very pretty. "There was just no *reason* for it."

"There's always a reason for suicide," I said. "Maybe we'll find one."

"But Jean had everything."

"Maybe she didn't think so, though," I said. "You say you got here a little after eight?"

She nodded. She was dry-eyed now, a lot more calm than she'd been at first.

"And then what did you do? I mean exactly. Step by step."

"I've already told that other detective. Isn't it bad enough to walk in and find—"

"I'm sorry, Miss Johnson," I said. "I'm just doing a job." I took out my notebook. "You arrived here a few minutes after eight. Then what?"

Stan Rayder appeared in the kitchen doorway. "Come in here a moment, Sarge," he said, and went back.

I got up. "I'll be with you in a minute, Miss Johnson," I said, and went into the kitchen.

Stan and the assistant M.E. were bending down over the girl. There were three kitchen chairs pushed together in a row in front of the gas stove, and the girl lay on these with her head partly in the oven. The M.E. had pulled her housecoat aside, but otherwise the body was exactly as we'd found it. The lab boys were packing up their equipment, and the photographer was replacing the lens cap on his Speed-Graphic.

The assistant M.E. glanced up at me. "You've got a homicide on your hands, Jess," he said. "This girl was dead before the gas went on."

I stepped close. "You sure, Ben?"

"Hell, yes."

"Then what was the cause of death?"

"I don't know yet. But the blood settled to her left side. It takes anywhere from an hour to two hours for postmortem lividity to show up, and in this case it's as pronounced as it'll ever be. The point is, she must have been dead at least an hour before somebody put her on the chairs. She's lying on her back now, but the p.m. lividity is on the left side."

I looked at the purplish discoloration. When the heart stops, the blood is no longer under pressure and it stops circulating. It settles in the body at the point nearest the floor. I hadn't seen the girl's body before, of course, because the initial examination of a corpse is the job of the M.E.'s office.

"How about those bruises?" I asked. "You think any of those could have caused death?"

"Could be. Most of them are pretty old, but you never can tell."

"When can you do the autopsy, doc?"

"We're lucky there. I can do it right away." He flipped the girl's housecoat back over her body and straightened up. "I've done all I can for you, Jess. I know she didn't die with her head in that oven, and that's about all I'll know till I get her on the table. She's been dead — oh, say about five hours. Maybe a little longer."

I made a note of the approximate time of death and then asked Stan to tell the hospital attendants outside to come in and get the body. When they'd put her in the basket, signed a receipt for her, and left, I told the lab boys they could go back to Headquarters, and then I went out to the other room to talk to Miss Johnson. Stan Rayder, meanwhile, had begun his routine search of the entire apartment.

2.

"I heard you out there," the girl said. "I just *knew* something like this would happen. I —" She broke off, biting at her lip.

I watched her carefully. I could read fear in her face, but not much else. Not that it meant anything. People always feel fear first, before they sort out their other emotions.

"How'd you know it would happen?" I asked.

She glanced at me, a little startled. "What?"

"You just said you knew something like this would happen," I said. "What made you say that?"

"Well . . ."

"You ever hear anyone threaten her?"

"No."

"You know of anyone who might have killed her?"

She shook her head.

"Why, then? I mean, why did you say you knew this would happen?"

She moistened her lips, staring at a spot on the wall just above my left shoulder. "Well, I didn't really *know* it, of course. It's just that — well, she did treat them badly, and —"

"Treat who badly?"

"She had several men friends . . . and her husband still came around sometimes."

"How about women? Any enemies you know about?"

She thought a moment. "No. She really didn't have many girl friends. Not any, really."

"What about you? You were a friend of hers, weren't you?"

She bit at her lip again, frowning a little now. "Well, yes — in a way . . ."

"What do you mean, in a way? You were her roommate, weren't you?" I could see I might sound a little brusque with her, and I

softened my tone a bit. "You understand how it is," I added. "These things have to be asked."

"I know," she said. "It's just that we'd stopped living together. I moved out about a week ago, and I hadn't seen her since."

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. It was her men friends, mostly. There was always someone here, and sometimes more than one. She'd make dates with two different men for the same night, and then when they came here, there'd be trouble. She seemed to like the idea of having men fighting over her. It got so I couldn't invite any of my own friends here, because I was afraid there'd be some kind of a scene."

"She drank quite a bit," I said.

"Yes. Yes, she did." She paused. "How did you know?"

"Her body's covered with what we call bottle bruises," I said. "A real lush falls down a lot, and knocks into things a lot. They're always bruising themselves. When you see someone with a lot of old bruises all over them, and some new ones too, you've probably got a dipso on your hands."

She shook her head slowly, as if remembering something. "She used to be a wonderful person," she said. "Then she started drinking more and more. Finally she lost her job, and from then on I couldn't handle her at all. She was a couple of years younger than I, and I — well, I'd always felt responsible for her."

"We'll get back to these men friends in a minute," I said. "First, though, I want you to tell me what you did when you got here this morning. You told me before that you came over to pick up some clothing you'd left here . . . Isn't eight o'clock in the morning sort of early to do a thing like that?"

She looked at me sharply.

"The questions have to be asked," I reminded her.

"Certainly you don't think I —"

I didn't say anything.

She stared at me a moment, and then shrugged. "I wanted a particular dress I had here. I wanted to wear it this afternoon. And the way Jean lived, eight o'clock in the morning was as good a time as any other."

"I see." I watched one of the mobiles on the ceiling move a few inches in one direction, and then move back again. "Where are you living now, Miss Johnson?"

"With another girl, on Fourteenth Street."

"Were you there last night? Say, from midnight on?"

She hesitated, then shook her head.

"Where were you?"

"With — a friend."

"Who?"

She folded her hands in her lap and studied them a moment. "With a soldier."

"Where?"

Her eyes came up. "Honestly, I don't see why —"

"What you do with your nights doesn't interest me at all," I told her. "Except, of course, if you spent last night here."

"But I didn't! I just told you!"

"What's this soldier's name, and where'd you spend the night with him?"

She started to get up, then suddenly sat back down again and spread her hands helplessly. "His name was Ralph Kirk, and I — we had a room at the Dayson Hotel, on Seventy-second Street. West Seventy-second."

I wrote it down. "Now what did you do when you got here this morning? Take it from the moment you got to the front door."

"I — well, I pushed the buzzer, but there wasn't any answer. I thought Jean was probably passed out from liquor, like she was a lot of times, and I let myself in. I still had my key. The second I opened the door, I smelled the gas. I knew it had to be coming from the kitchen, and I ran out there." She paused.

"And then?"

"It was — horrible. Just horrible. I saw Jean lying there on those chairs, and the way her head was in the oven and all, and then I ran upstairs to get the super. I — I couldn't bear to come back with him, so I stayed in his apartment with his wife while he came down here to — to . . ."

"You didn't try to open the windows to let the gas out?"

"I couldn't think. It was so horrible, and the gas made me so sick to my stomach. I did think to leave the kitchen door open, and I left the hall door open, too, but I was just too scared and sick to think about much else."

"You just came in and ran right out again? You didn't touch anything?"

"Heavens no!"

"All right. Now what about these men?"

"They came and went. There were so many . . ."

"You probably remember some of their names, though."

"Well . . . well I do remember a couple of them. Full names, I mean. Most of the others I knew by just their first names."

"These two full names you do remember — were they her main friends?"

"Yes, I guess you'd say that. Every time they came around, Jean would make me leave the apartment. They'd never go out anywhere."

"Why not?"

"Both of them were married. They didn't want to be seen, I guess."

"Uh-huh."

"One of them is Clarence Walling and the other is Fred Baird."

"You know their addresses?"

"Jean has them listed on the front of the phone book."

"How about the husband?"

"Hal? I don't know where he

lives. I don't think Jean did, either. She wanted to have him arrested one night, but she couldn't tell the cops where to find him. They never did, either."

"Why did she want him arrested?"

"He came over here one night, but she wouldn't let him in. He was drunk, and he kicked the door down. But then he got scared when someone yelled for the super, and he left."

"Where's the husband work, then?"

"He doesn't work anywhere, so far as I know. I guess you'd call him a bum. He hangs around the Bowery quite a bit, and around the Village some. I don't know much about him, except that Jean was afraid of him. He was still jealous of her, even though they'd been separated over a year, and he used to wait outside for Jean's friends and try to beat them up."

"These married men — Walling and Baird — did they know one another?"

"Oh, no. She was always very careful about that."

"But the other guys got a little different treatment?"

"Yes. She liked to — well, play one against the other."

"Did either Walling or Baird give Jean money?"

She hesitated. "I — I guess they must have. I can't imagine any other reason she'd have anything to do with them. She always had all the money she wanted, and clothes and things, but she hadn't worked for a long time."

Stan Rayder came back from the bedroom.

"Any luck?" I asked.

"Not a thing. Unless you count a lot of empties under the bed."

"She'd do that a lot," the girl said. "Take a bottle to bed with her, I mean."

I looked up the number of the Dayson Hotel, identified myself, and asked if they had a Ralph Kirk registered, and if not, whether he had stayed with them the night before. The clerk came back after a few moments to say there was no Ralph Kirk with them now and there had been none last night. I thanked him and hung up.

"Well?" the girl said.

"No Ralph Kirk, miss."

She moistened her lips. "Well, he must have used another name, then. Naturally, he —"

"How well did you know this soldier?" I asked.

"How well? Why, I —" She paused. "I just met him last night. In a bar off Broadway, on Seventy-second."

I glanced at the phone book and wrote down the numbers of Clarence Walling and Fred Baird, and then I stood up and nodded to Stan. "Take her up to the Dayson Hotel," I said. "See if you can find anyone who remembers her. If the night clerk's off duty, look him up and see what he says.

Check with the elevator operators and the bellhops, and see what happens."

The girl was on her feet in an instant. "Are you arresting me?"

"Take it easy," I told her. "We want you to help us, that's all."

"It doesn't sound that way. It sounds as if you think I —"

"We don't think anything," I said. "This is police routine, and it has to be done. The sooner we can account for you, the sooner we can get on to something else."

Stan grinned at her and nodded to the door. "Let's go, miss," he said. The girl glanced from one of us to the other, a little angry, but finally she turned and walked toward the door.

"You going to hang around here a while, Sarge?" Stan asked.

"Couple minutes," I said.

"Check with you at the precinct?"

"Yeah." I looked at the girl. "What'd Jean's husband look like?" I asked.

Her voice sounded a little choked. "He — he's tall, and thin and blond. I guess you'd say he's got a hatchet face, sort of."

"How old?"

"Oh . . . about thirty, I guess."

3.

After Stan and the girl had left the apartment, I dialed the precinct and told the squad commander our suicide had become a homicide. I filled him in, and then asked for a pickup on Hal Proctor, the dead girl's husband. I gave the lieutenant the best description of Proctor I could, from what the Johnson girl had told me, and relayed what she'd said about his hanging around the Bowery and the Village. The lieutenant said the alarm would go out in a couple of minutes, and asked if I needed more help. I told him no, that Stan was taking the girl over to the hotel and that I was going to talk to a couple of the men the dead girl had known. I told him I was to meet Stan at the station house, and hung up.

Some detectives like to work with a big crew. I don't. I hate to tie up any more men than is absolutely necessary. The Uniform Force would pick Proctor up, and inasmuch as he and Miss Johnson were our best bets so far, I didn't see any point in pulling in a lot of men until both Proctor and the girl had washed out on us — if they did.

Stan and I had brought two patrolmen with us from the station house. I left one of them staked out in the apartment, and the other patrolman and I drove uptown to a coffee shop and had some breakfast. Then I went back to the phone booth and called Clarence Walling's number. It turned out to be an office on Lexington Avenue. The girl who answered told me Mr. Walling was not in, and would not be in all day. I identified myself, and the girl told me Walling was

home. She gave me his address — 612 West Ninety-first Street — and I thanked her and hung up.

4.

Clarence Walling had been expecting me. He was a heavy-set, balding man, somewhere between fifty and fifty-five.

"My secretary called me," he said as he let me into the apartment. "What's wrong?"

"Just a routine check, Mr. Walling," I said.

It wasn't an especially warm day, but Walling's face was sheened with sweat and his blue silk sport shirt hung to him damply. His eyes were bloodshot, and I noticed his hands shook a little. He looked like a man with a bad hangover.

"Routine? Really, now, officer."

"I'm Sergeant Selby," I said. "You know a girl named Jean Proctor, I believe." I watched him. His eyes narrowed a bit, and he swallowed a time or two.

"Yes," he said finally. "I know Jean. What's this all about?"

"Did you see her last night?"

"Why, no. I haven't seen her — let's see — since last Tuesday. Is she in trouble?"

He hadn't asked me to sit down, so I sat down anyhow.

He looked at me a moment, and then moved toward a cellarette. "I need a hair of the dog," he said, and poured a highball glass halfway up with bourbon. He drank it, poured another, and started back toward me. Then he seemed to remember suddenly that he had company, and said, "Would you like a drink, Sergeant?"

I shook my head.

"You don't mind if I do?"

"Not at all. Where were you last night, Mr. Walling — say from about midnight until about six or seven?"

He thought it over, swirling the whiskey around slowly in his glass. "Let's put it this way," he said. "I'm not an unreasonable man, but I think you are. I believe I have every right to know why I should be questioned this way, and in my own home too. If you'll tell me your reason for being here, I may tell you where I was."

"Jean Proctor was murdered last night, Mr. Walling," I said.

He didn't quite drop the glass, but he had to bring his other hand up quickly to avoid it. He stared at me a long moment, while his face paled, and then he sat down so suddenly most of the whiskey sloshed out of the glass and onto his lap. He formed the word once with his lips without actually saying it, and then he said it aloud: "Murdered?"

I nodded. Walling seemed genuinely stunned, but you never can tell. "I was told you were a very good friend of hers," I said.

It took him almost a full minute to get control of himself, but once the control was there I had the feeling it was there for keeps. "Yes,"

he said at last. "Yes, we were very good friends, Jean and I." He shook his head slowly, unbelievingly. "Murdered . . . My God . . . Who killed her?"

"That's what we're trying to find out," I said.

"You mean you think *I*—"

"Not at all," I said. "It's just as I told you — routine. But I'm afraid I'll have to ask you where you were last night, Mr. Walling."

He stared down at the spreading whiskey stains on his pant legs. "I was with a girl," he said tonelessly. "Another girl, not Jean."

"Mind telling me who?"

"I guess I haven't much choice, have I?"

"I'm afraid not, Mr. Walling."

"I was with — my sister-in-law."

"All night?"

"Yes. All night." He set his glass down and rubbed his face with his hands. "Lord," he said, "this is terrible. Everything will come out now."

"Everything?"

"I mean my wife will find out now. About Jean — and about Joyce too."

"Joyce — is that your sister-in-law?"

"Yes. She's considerably younger than my wife . . . a widow."

"You mean you've been seeing your wife's sister the same way you were seeing Jean, Mr. Walling? Clandestinely?"

He nodded. "It's an uncomfortable thing to admit, but that's the way it is."

"Where was your wife last night, Mr. Walling?"

"She's been away a few days."

"Out of town, you mean?"

"Yes. She's been visiting her mother in Albany. She'll be back tomorrow." He reached for his glass and swallowed the rest of the whiskey. "I guess we all have to pay the piper, sooner or later. I don't mind about myself so much, but when my wife finds out that I've been sleep — been having an affair with her own sister, I—"

"I'm not here to cause you unnecessary trouble, Mr. Walling," I said. "Your personal life is your own. If you can establish where you were last night, the information will go no further. That's a matter for your own conscience." I paused. "We'll have to take a run over there," I said.

Walling said nothing on the way over with the patrolman and me, and almost nothing once we arrived. An hour later I had him back in front of his apartment house. His hangover seemed to be worse than ever, and he looked a good ten years older than he had when I first saw him. But his sister-in-law had backed up his story, and unless something else turned up, he was in the clear. But in the clear only so far as the police were concerned, I reflected. Part of his little setup had exploded in his face, and I didn't envy him the day his wife tumbled to the fact that he'd been double-timing her with two mistresses, and that one of them was her own sister.

5.

The patrolman and I checked in the RMP car, and I climbed the stairs and walked along the corridor to the squad room. The squad commander was the only one around.

"Has Stan been in?" I asked.

The lieutenant shook his head. "No. How's that girl he took over to the hotel? Pretty?"

"Yeah."

"Maybe he ran off with her."

"Maybe." I picked up the alarm book and thumbed through the flimsies.

"You looking for the one on Hal Proctor?" the lieutenant asked.

"Uh-huh."

"Second sheet, near the bottom."

It was very brief; almost too brief. The Uniform Force would be doing the best they could with it, but they didn't have much to go on. The teletype entry read:

ZZZZZZZZZZZZ
ALARM 8777 CODE SIG A-9 AUTH 1ST SQD JULY 16 — 9:45 AM APPREHEND FOR QUESTIONING — HOMICIDE — HAL PROCTOR — M-W-25-5-11-150 — BLOND HAIR — SHARP FEATURES — SLIM BUILD — PROBABLY SHABBY CLOTHES — 3-INCH SCAR ON RIGHT WRIST
ZZZZZZZZZZZZ

I glanced at the lieutenant. "Where'd you get that info on the scar?"

"I went through the RKC's," he said. "I left Proctor's card on your desk."

I picked up the *Resident Known Criminal* card and flipped it over to look at Proctor's picture. He had a hatchet face, all right, and there wasn't anything phony about the hardness in his eyes, but he was still a pretty good-looking guy. A lot of women had gone for guys like that before, and a lot of them would keep right on going for them. I turned the card over again to read the information on the front.

RESIDENT KNOWN CRIMINAL

NAME: Halston Proctor
ALIAS: Harry Pryor, Hal Barnes, Hal Parker
ADDRESS: Not fixed
BOROUGH: Man. PRCT: 1st
CRIMINAL SPECIALTY: Petit Larceny
NAME OF ASSOCIATES: ——
PRISON (IN OR OUT): Believed out.

I skipped down the list of physical characteristics to the bottom of the reverse side.

REMARKS

Dr. Rhodes believes Proctor to be a constitutional psychopathic inferior. Proctor is dangerous when drunk. Panhandler, and sometimes touts tourists to dice and card rooms in Village. Fourteen arrests for vag; three for Dis. Con.; one for simple assault; one for felonious assault with knife. No

convictions for assault. Two convictions, petit larceny; one suspension, one 3–6 mos. Released Sept. '52.

I replaced the card in the RKC file and called Bellevue Hospital. When I'd been routed to the assistant M.E. who was posting Jean Proctor's body, I asked what he'd found.

"I just finished, Jess," he said. "I was just lighting up a cigarette before I called you." I heard the sound of a match being struck. "It was one of those bruises, all right. She was either struck or kicked in the stomach. It killed her. The blow must have been a violent one, Jess."

"No question about the cause of death?"

"None at all. And, incidentally, there was no sexual assault."

"You find anything else?"

"Well, she'd had quite a bit to drink. There was a three per cent alcohol count in the blood, and that means she was just a couple of drinks away from stupor."

"Yeah. Well, thanks, Ben."

"Sure." He hung up.

The lieutenant threw a small envelope on my desk and grinned at me.

"What the hell's that?" I asked.

"Tickets," he said. "For the police benefit next Wednesday. I told the commissioner we'd sell a double quota for him, seeing we did so well last year."

"On our free time, naturally."

"Naturally."

6.

I stuck the envelope in my pocket and sat down at my desk to type up a 61 form on the homicide. I'd just rolled the original and carbons in the battered No. 5 Underwood when the phone rang. It was Patrolman Jenkins, the cop I'd asked to talk to the neighbors.

"I thought I'd better check with you, Sarge," he said. "It's N.G. with me. Nobody saw anything. Nobody heard anything. To listen to them, you'd think nobody in the Village was home all night."

"Yeah. Well, report back in, then."

"I'm supposed to be off now. Can you sign me out downstairs?"

"Sure. Go on home."

"Thanks, Sarge."

I hung up and then called the desk officer downstairs and asked him to sign Jenkins out at his regular time.

"I'm going out for some chow," the lieutenant said. "Want to come along?"

"I had some," I said. "I could use some more coffee, though."

"Black?"

"Uh-huh."

He left, and I went on typing up the Complaint Report. When I'd gone as far as I could with it, I put it aside and called BCI. They had nothing on Jean Proctor, and nothing new on her husband. Earlier, when we'd first arrived on the scene, Stan Rayder had questioned

the Johnson girl about Mrs. Proctor's next of kin. He'd found there was none, so far as the Johnson girl knew, except for the husband.

I made a couple of other calls, but the crime lab had turned up nothing useful; and BOSSI, the special squad to whom Headquarters routed a report of all homicides and suicides, had found no subversive activities or affiliations. Lately, we'd been investigating all except the most obvious suicides as if they were homicides, at least so far as the initial steps went, and so the work done by the crime lab and the others was as thorough as it was going to be, unless there were new developments.

Stan Rayder came into the squad room and straddled the straight chair next to my desk.

"Where's your girl friend?" I asked.

"I took her home."

"She checked out okay?"

"Yeah. She bedded down with that soldier, all right. The night clerk remembered her. Trouble was, I had a hell of a time finding the guy. He'd gone off duty at eight. We finally caught up with him, and he went back with us and we found this soldier still in the sack. He'd registered under a phony, naturally, and I guess he lost a couple years' growth when the girl and the night clerk and the manager and I walked in on him." He grinned. "But the guy admitted right off they'd climbed in the hay together, and hadn't left it until early this morning. About six, he said, and the girl'd already told me the same." He picked up the alarm book and ran a thumbnail down the entries. "Busy day for cops," he said. "More items than I've seen in a couple months."

"There was a lot of wickedness in in this city last night, Stan," I said.

"Yeah? How so?"

I told him about Walling.

"It's a sinful town, all right," Stan said. "What do we do next on this Proctor girl?"

"I have to check on a guy named Fred Baird," I said. "He and Walling were footing her bills, and I guess each of them figured he was head man. If Baird washes out, we'll get the lieutenant to pull in a few more cops for us and start checking on all the men Mrs. Proctor ever even said hello to."

"She was a popular kid. We could make a career out of this one case."

"Looks like it."

"Hey!" Stan said suddenly. "What'd you say this guy's name was? The guy doubling up with his wife and sister-in-law?"

"Clarence Walling. Why?"

"That's it! Talk about your delayed reactions!" He started flipping through the earlier pages in the alarm book, scanning the listings rapidly.

"Let's don't have any mysteries around here, Stan," I said. "What'd you do — take this Johnson girl in for a few drinks somewhere?"

"On my salary I can't afford to buy girls drinks. Look at this." He handed me the alarm book, underlining an item with his fingernail. "I noticed this when it came in, before we went out on Proctor."

The item read:

ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ
ALARM 143 CODE SIG D-1 AUTH 18TH SQD JULY 16-6:10 AM CAR 29 — CONTACT WOMAN NORTHEAST CORNER COLUMBUS AVE & 66TH — NAME MRS. EDNA WALLING — STATES SHE WANTS TO TALK TO POLICE

"Not too many people named Walling," Stan said.

7.

I picked up the phone and called the Eighteenth Precinct. I learned that Car Twenty-nine had gone to Columbus and Sixty-sixth and waited the better part of an hour. But the woman hadn't showed. The cops had called back to the precinct, found the woman had sounded a little incoherent, though not drunk, and they'd chalked it up as just another of the crackpot calls the police get by the dozen.

Next I called Clarence Walling and discovered that his wife had driven to Albany in one of the family's two cars. I got a description of Mrs. Walling and the car, tried to avoid upsetting Walling any more than was avoidable, and then got out a pickup for a new Cadillac, black, with the license number he'd given me. I left instructions that any info on the car should be radioed to Stan and me, and then we left the squad room and went downstairs to check out an RMP.

We found a parking place just off Columbus and walked back to the corner of Sixty-sixth. There was no one answering Mrs. Walling's description and no black Cadillac. We covered the bars in the immediate neighborhood, and then started on the ones along Broadway, always keeping an eye out for the Cadillac.

We found the Cadillac parked near the corner at Sixty-fifth. There was a woman in the front seat, and she answered the description.

I opened the door and bent down. "Mrs. Walling?"

She was about forty, I guessed, a beautifully dressed woman with hair just beginning to gray. She was very attractive, but you'd call her handsome rather than pretty.

She nodded almost imperceptibly.

"We're policemen, Mrs. Walling. You said you wanted to talk to us."

"Yes," she said softly. "I called . . . and then I . . . lost my nerve."

"May we get in?"

She nodded again. Stan got into the back and I slid into the front seat next to Mrs. Walling.

"What'd you want to tell us?" I asked.

She stared straight ahead, her

face almost expressionless. "I — I killed a girl last night." She paused.

I didn't say anything, and neither did Stan.

"She was trying to break up my home," Mrs. Walling said. "My husband is a good man, but he is a weak man. He met this — this person some time ago. I — I found out about it one night when he had been drinking. He said his conscience hurt him and he had to confess to me. He told me all about this girl, where she lived, and everything else. I went to her and told her I was aware of what had been going on. She promised she would never see him again. My husband had already promised the same thing — that is, that he would never see her." She paused again.

I waited almost a full minute, and then I said, "But they forgot their promises?"

"Yes. They forgot. I drove up to Albany to visit my mother, planning to return tomorrow. But I missed Clarence so much that I decided to come back yesterday. I had motor trouble on the way, and I didn't arrive at our apartment until four o'clock in the morning. My husband wasn't there. I thought he must be with this — girl. I went to her apartment. She was very drunk, or I don't suppose she would have let me in. We had words . . . I don't know, it seems so long ago now, as if it happened in my childhood. A bad dream . . ."

I nodded. "Please go on, Mrs. Walling."

She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "I got the idea somehow that she was hiding my husband in her bedroom. When I tried to go in there, the girl struck me, and we started fighting. She slipped and fell, and before I knew what I was doing, I kicked her. In the stomach, I think. I . . ."

"It's best to tell it all at once, Mrs. Walling," Stan said gently. "It's a lot better that way."

"Yes. Yes, I suppose it is . . . I couldn't believe she was dead. When I finally accepted the fact that I'd killed her, I was frantic. I had a dear friend once who committed suicide, and I remembered how she had done it. I thought I could make it look as if this girl had done the same. I dragged her into the kitchen . . ." Her voice broke off and she began to sob.

I turned to glance at Stan. "You want to bring the RMP around here?" I asked. "And you'd better call the precinct about this. And listen, Stan — tell them to put out a cancellation on Proctor."

"We'll take you down to the office in our own car, Mrs. Walling," I said. "We'll tell your husband where this one is parked."

Her eyes were suddenly very bright. "I'm so sorry for him," she said. "So awfully sorry . . ."

I didn't say anything, but I didn't feel sorry for her husband. For my money, she'd killed the wrong one.

CRIME CAVALCADE

BY VINCENT H. GADDIS

Batty Burglaries

The "bear facts" were sufficient to arrest a Detroit citizen recently, when tavern owner Cass Steck called police, to announce that a 365 pound Canadian black bear had disappeared from his establishment. Steck had killed the bear on a hunting trip and intended to serve it to his customers. Through a tip from a bus driver, police found the carcass in the basement of Zigmund Mucha, 29. Mucha, though admitting his memory was hazy, insisted that on visiting the tavern he had struggled valiantly with the bear, overcome it, and took it to his home. Steck got his bear feast, and Mucha, a charge of grand larceny.

In Wilmington, N. C., a constable found no one at home when he tried to serve an eviction notice on tenants of a three-room frame home. Several days later he returned and found the house had disappeared. Neighbors could give no clue as to the missing structure.

When a branch postoffice in London, England was robbed of its safe, stamps, and savings certificates, the only clue was a witness who saw among the departing thieves a man with a "square object making a buzzing sound" under his arm. Police identified this as the burglar alarm.

A bandit with a loving heart escaped with $5000 in jewelry and cash from a Los Angeles restaurant recently. Mrs. Faye Provine, operator, told police that as he collected the cash he held her hand tenderly and patted her cheek. Then, spotting her $1500 ring and $400 watch, he asked if they were insured. When she said yes, he added them to his loot.

In Phoenix, Ariz. another cafe owner was able to foil a burglary attempt by her skill with the skillet. Awakened in her living quarters behind the restaurant in the middle of the night, Mrs Harry Deciovich found a bandit rummaging behind the counter. After telling her he was hungry, he consumed a meal of ham and eggs, then departed lootless with a polite, "Thank you."

Doing What Came Naturally

In Mineola, N. Y., Roman Lanzilotta, 24, was fined $100 for drunken driving after his car crossed a lawn and struck a house, uprooted a tree,

sideswiped another house, and finished by shooting into a garage, pushing the car in it straight through and collapsing the structure. Lanzilotta explained his expert technique by identifying himself as a housewrecker by trade.

His Little Hatchet

An upstanding citizen of Lafayette, Ind. telephoned the police to admit knocking over a parking meter with his car. His name, he confessed, was George Washington.

Strange Statistics

A Texas Supreme Court Justice, Will Wilson, confessed his bewilderment at finding his state four times higher than California in its murder rate. This just doesn't make sense, he contends, since California is the "traditional home of the nut, the screwball and the neurotic."

Pink D. T.'s

Inmates of the Allen County jail in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, sobered up rapidly at sight of a novel companion — a real pink elephant.

Shackled to the jail floor with three normal members of the species, the animals belonged to a Chicago-bound circus, and had been brought there by their trainer, Roy Bush, who was unable to find any other stable.

The first elephant's giddy color was due to a paint job which had been put on for a circus speciality act.

Careless Canines

Many states will not admit evidence obtained through bloodhounds, and most of those that do insist that such testimony reinforce other evidence obtained through more normal channels, and not be admitted by itself. Even then, individual dogs must first have been proved reliable sleuths by their former exploits. In spite of phenomenal skill, these dogs make curious mistakes, as shown by a case in which they led police to the home of a man who was fortunately able to prove complete innocence. He had, however, visited the dogs' kennel a few days before, and apparently they preferred his remembered scent to the real culprit's.

Refined Revenge

A Lynn, Mass. woman, Mrs. Ruby Cavanagh, 29, pleading for a divorce, testified in Salem Probate Court that her husband objected so violently to her watching TV that he pitched an ax through the TV screen.

And in Boston a wife was granted a quick divorce after testifying that her spouse swatted her with a cat, rubbed her face with a long-dead fish, and then locked her up in the pantry with a very live mouse.

Aerial Arrest

In New York City helicopters are being used by the police de-

partment with remarkable success. There a police helicopter pilot, Sgt. Harold Behrens, saw two youths escaping in a rowboat after a warehouse robbery. The resourceful Behrens landed the 'copter in front of the rowboat and blew it right into the path of a police launch approaching the scene.

How Dry He Was

In Adel, Iowa, an indignant man has sued the city for $25,000 damages. He said that officials put him on a blacklist, thus instructing tavern operators not to serve him the beer he desperately needed to cure his "exhausted and dehydrated condition."

Invited Inn

Police in Houston, Tex. claim that a cafe in that city has a name just too tempting to thieves, who ducked in and wobbled out with $25 from the till of the *Duck Inn and Wobble Out.*

Detected Detector

State Police ticketed the state's own test truck at Waverly, Neb. recently. The truck, which is used for checking overloading of other trucks, was found to be overloaded with weights for scales.

Play Money

In San Francisco two men were arrested after they astonished spectators by lighting their cigarettes with $5 and $10 bills in a number of night spots. They were Gerald A. Burns, 39, and Keneth D. Campbell, 27, partners in a mailing service, who admitted running off a couple of hundred dollars just for fun. They wanted to test a new reproducing camera, they said, and intended to destroy the counterfeit bills in one spectacular spree. However, at least three of the bills got away from them.

They were indicted on three counts each of counterfeiting charges punishable by up to 45 years in prison and a $15,000 fine. While the district service director, Paul Paterni, agreed that they had obviously had no intention of passing phoney cash, he stated that the counterfeit law does not take criminal intent into consideration.

Police Courtesy

In Tuscon, Ariz., a sheriff's deputy arrested Ollie Biles for threatening him over the telephone, then promptly released him on hearing his reason. "I thought I was talking to the city police," he explained.

In High Point, N. C., Police Sgt. Walter L. Elliott answered the phone to hear a sweet teen-age voice.

"Would you please call me back in twelve minutes?" she begged. Questioned, she came up with the facts.

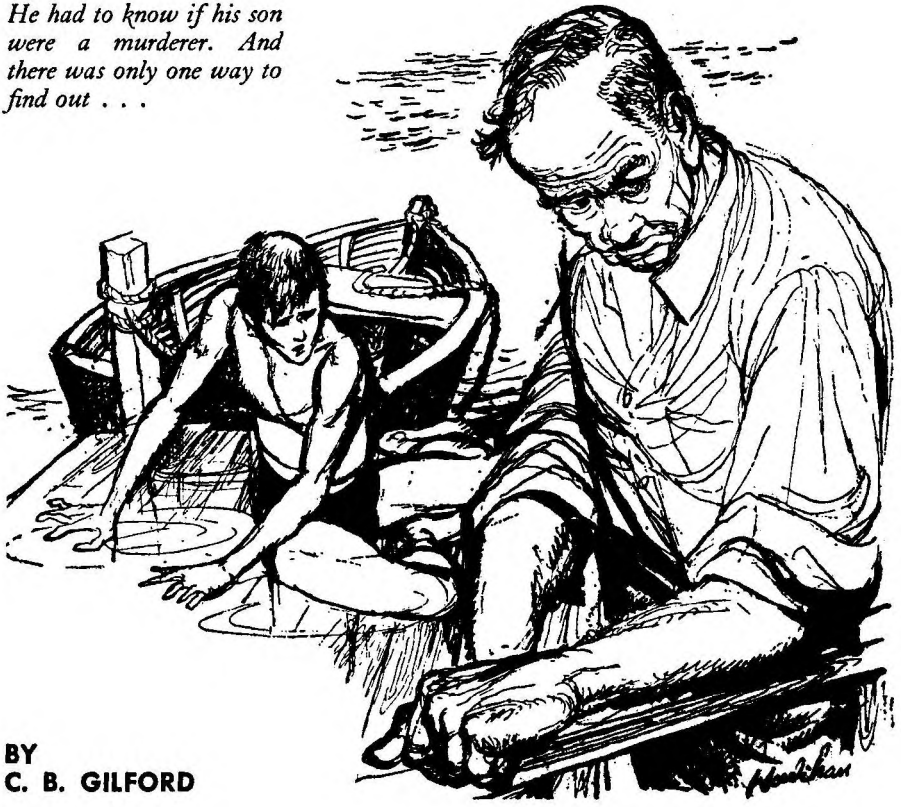
"I don't have any clock here. And I have to time a cake in the oven."

IT WAS DARK when they arrived. At the door the man fumbled with the keys. But because his hands were shaking, he could not seem to find either the keyhole or the correct key. Finally the boy took the keys. They went inside. The boy found the light switch.

"It's like an oven in here," the man said.

That Stranger, My Son

He had to know if his son were a murderer. And there was only one way to find out . . .



BY
C. B. GILFORD

But the boy refused to abandon his smile. "We're home, Dad," he answered. He started making the rounds of the windows, unlatching them, heaving them upward.

The man did not join in the homecoming chores. He looked all around him, taking inventory of the familiar walls and furniture. The close, hot atmosphere of the room quickly brought beads of perspiration to his face. But he was too unaware of it even to apply a sleeve to his forehead.

"Dad, make yourself at home!" The boy had returned, the persistent smile with him. He crossed the room to the man and hugged him briefly, without embarrassment.

The man made no motion to return the show of affection. "Are all the windows open?" he asked.

"Sure thing, Dad."

The man peered closely at his son. The boy was not much shorter than his father, and though he lacked the man's mature heaviness, he showed promise of future hardihood and power.

"You're a strong boy for thirteen, Paul," the man said.

"Yes," the boy agreed proudly. "I'm like you, Dad."

"And Davey wasn't like me. Is that it?"

"Don't talk about Davey, Dad . . ."

"He was my son!"

"But he's dead!"

A gray shadow of worry flitted across the boy's face. Like his father, he had begun to perspire. The wetness glistened on his smooth, tanned skin.

"We're alone now, Paul. For the first time since it happened." The man walked back to the door and closed it, shutting out a portion of the small breeze. "Sit down. I want to talk to you."

"You're pretty tired, Dad. Can't we talk tomorrow?"

"Now, Paul. Sit down."

Obediently the boy sat in a chair. The expression on his face was blank, submissive.

"What happened to Davey, Paul?" the man began.

"Dad, I've told you a hundred times. I've told everybody."

"I don't mean that, Paul. I want you to tell me what really happened."

"I've told you everything I remember," the boy answered cautiously.

"You said it was Davey's own idea to go swimming?"

"Yes, he said this summer he wanted to become a real good swimmer."

"You encouraged him?"

"No, I told him he was too little. And he wasn't very strong."

"Because you knew that would make him want to become a good swimmer all the more? He always envied his big brother, didn't he, Paul? . . . So like a big brother should, you went out with him?"

"Yes, we swam out together. Not very far. Then I said to Davey, 'We better swim back now.' I thought he

heard me. So I started back, and I thought he was with me. When I was halfway in, I looked up and he wasn't there. He was out toward the middle. He'd been swimming away from the shore all the time. And he was calling for help."

"Then what happened, Paul?"

"Dad, I've told you . . ." The boy stood up. He wiped across his eyes with the back of his hand. But his hand was wet too.

"Sit down, Paul. Tell me again."

The boy was accustomed to obedience. He sat down again. "I knew I couldn't swim clear out to where Davey was and then swim all the way back with him. The only thing to do was to come the rest of the way in and get the boat. That's what I did."

"Did the motor start right away?"

"Not right at first. But it was only a minute. Then I steered right out to where I'd seen Davey. I figured he'd gone down but he'd be up again. I went to the place and stopped the boat and jumped into the water. But I couldn't find him . . ."

The boy could see that his father had not moved, except for the big hands which kept closing into fists and then opening again. In the ensuing silence he watched the hands.

"Is that all?" the man asked finally.

"Yes."

"It's not all!" Almost in one stride the man was across the room and standing over the boy's chair.

The boy waited. Not daring to look into his father's eyes, the boy watched the fists instead.

"There's one thing I've never asked you, Paul." The man's words came thickly. "If you really loved your brother, Paul, why did you take the time to go back for the boat? If you loved him, why didn't you swim out there and do your best . . . even if you drowned with him?"

The boy lifted his head, daring to meet the wild look in his father's eyes. He spoke finally, his voice steady and clear.

"I'm glad I didn't do that, Dad," he said. "If I'd have drowned with Davey, you'd have been left here all alone."

The man's rage ebbed out of him with a terrible suddenness, leaving him white and shaking. He groped his way unsteadily to the door, threw it open, and sucked in the cooler, reviving air of the outdoors.

Without going to him, the boy stood up and explained himself simply. "I love you, Dad," he said.

The man did not turn back. "Go to bed, Paul," he ordered finally.

"All right, Dad. See you in the morning."

"Yes, in the morning."

The sun rose early, and the day was hot before it was half an hour old. The boy, accustomed to waking at dawn, slept a few minutes later this morning, because he was tired from the motor trip. But the heat and light eventually roused him. He

dressed sketchily, and found his father already up, standing in front of the fireplace, staring at the photograph perched above it.

But the boy did not go to him. He moved instead to the open door, breathed the morning air with great satisfaction. "The lake looks fine this morning," he began.

"I never noticed until just now," the man answered, "how strange that picture really is. Come here and look at it, Paul. There are you and I on the left. We have our arms around each other. And your Mother and Davey on the right. Their arms are around each other. It isn't a group picture at all. It's divided right down the middle."

The boy came obediently. "That's the way it was, Dad," he said. "I belonged to you. Davey belonged to Mother."

"Davey was my son too!" It was a protest, but the man was tired.

"Sure, Dad. I mean that I was like you, and Davey wasn't. We did things together, and we liked the same things. Davey liked what Mother liked, books and pictures and things . . . And now we're together, and they're together. Maybe it's better, Dad . . . for Mother, I mean."

The man listened, strangely fascinated. In the end he turned away, and stood with sagging shoulders, looking at nothing. When he went finally to a chair and sat with his face hidden in his hands, the boy followed and knelt beside him.

"Sure you loved them, Dad," the boy said, soothing, comforting. "You stayed in town and worked when you really wanted to be out here. You bought Mother all the medicine she needed, and you paid for the operations. And I took care of the house. But they're gone now. Thinking about them won't bring them back and it'll spoil things for us."

It was an impassioned speech, and a long speech for a boy. It was the manifesto of a mind matured before its time by unusual responsibility.

"You said, Paul," the man answered finally, "that I loved Davey. What about you, Paul?"

"Me? Of course, Dad."

"You hated Davey, didn't you, Paul?"

The question surprised the boy. He rose from his kneeling position and backed away. For a long time he stood, thinking. Then he replied, "No, I didn't hate him, Dad. But I loved you more."

The simple confession went unanswered. The man continued to stare at the floor, lost in some secret sorrow. After a while the boy turned away. The conversation or trial or whatever it was, he knew, was over.

The boy's mind was of the very practical sort. And he was only thirteen. He went to the kitchen. He went about the task of preparing breakfast with the confidence and sureness which only a motherless boy can learn.

And when breakfast was finished,

he followed his father down to the dock, keeping worshipfully close to him. They stood together there for a while, watching the lake. The sun was hot on their heads. The water looked inviting to the boy, but he refrained from mentioning it.

The boat was sitting sluggishly beside the dock, its bottom heavy with rain water. Absently the man noted its condition.

"Somebody has stolen the motor," he concluded, but without dismay or alarm.

"No, Dad," the boy assured him. "I took it in the house."

"When?"

"Three days ago. Before we left."

"Just after we brought Davey in?"

"Yes. The motor's dry and safe."

The man seemed to shiver, as if hit by a sudden cool wind.

"Did you want to go out in the boat, Dad?" the boy asked eagerly.

"No, Paul. Not now."

The boy looked longingly at the water once more, but he did not argue. Together they walked back up to the house.

The boy loved the water. Every day, when he had finished his chores, he stripped to his swimming trunks and went down to the dock. There he would let the warmth of the sun possess him and, as time passed, his healthy tan deepened. Often, when it was very hot, he would sit on the dock with his legs dangling over the side. Then, by stretching a little, and pointing his feet downward, he could manage to get his toes into the water. But beyond this small delight he did not go. He did not swim.

The boy was, in fact, so supremely happy that no petty difficulty could touch him. His happiness was not even disturbed for very long when his father discovered the absence of the photograph.

"I was dusting," the boy explained easily. "It fell off and broke the glass. I put it away in a drawer until we could get another glass. I thought you'd want me to take good care of it."

The man did not argue. The fire that had begun to smoulder in his eyes died slowly. The boy's answer had been so open, frank, without mischief or guile.

And the boy passed the next test too, on the following day, at dinner time.

"I've been looking around," the man told him. "Everything's gone. Everything of Davey's. His books, his stamp collection, his brushes and paints. Even his clothes. The house doesn't look as if Davey ever lived here."

The boy was calm but wary. "I took care of it, Dad," he answered simply.

"Who told you to?"

"No one. But I thought it would be easier for me to do than for you. So it was my job."

The man stood up. He cast a long shadow over the table, and in the shadow the boy remained seated.

"None of the things I got rid of were any good. Davey was little and skinny. I couldn't wear any of his clothes. I didn't want his books or stamps or paints. If the things stayed around, they'd just remind you of Davey, and you'd be sad. So I burned everything."

The man walked away, walked to the open door and stared out.

From the table the boy said, "When Mother died you got rid of everything of hers. You said it wasn't right to have a house seem like it was lived in by somebody who didn't live there any more."

The man was wrestling with his thoughts. It was in his face, in the twitching of his mouth, in the look of intense concentration he turned toward his son.

He spoke at last, slowly, with great difficulty. "I've had terrible thoughts, Paul. Maybe I've been wrong."

"About what, Dad?"

"It doesn't matter now."

The boy went to him then, and they hugged each other, unashamedly. There were tears in the man's eyes, but the boy was too happy to cry.

"You're all I have left, Paul. I can't lose you. If I lose you, there's nothing."

It was enough for the boy.

In the morning the boy was up before his father. The day was warm and sticky like its predecessors. He went immediately to look out at the lake. The sight fascinated him. A soft, early breeze came through the door and caressed his bare skin. He felt exhilarated.

He checked first to make sure his father was still asleep. Then he donned his swimming trunks and went down to the dock. Even there he hesitated, the victim of grave doubts and his natural caution. But the attraction was too strong. He sat on the side at first and dangled his legs, wetting only his toes. A moment later, however, he had lowered his whole body into the beckoning, cooling, delightful water.

Then he commenced to swim, at first close by the dock, slowly, without exerting great effort, enjoying the water's touch and feel. Occasionally he plunged his head below the surface for a few seconds and then, coming up, he shook moisture from his face and eyes, blew spray out of his mouth, and laughed aloud from the sheer joy of the experience.

Finally he began swimming in earnest, making a straight course away from the dock. His strokes were long and churned the water furiously. He was the kind of swimmer whose progress could be noted and computed from quite a distance. He did not know how far he swam, but when his first burst of energy had been spent, he turned about and headed back toward shore. On this return journey he proceeded more slowly, stopping now and then to rest, floating on his back or treading water, even though he wasn't exhausted. He conserved his strength

in this way, so that when he finished, he was breathing easily and still felt good. And he was happier than he had been for a long time . . .

Until he climbed back on the dock, and found his father standing there, and saw his father's face. The face was hard and pale, the eyes in it cold, deadly.

"I saw you out there," the man said. "I saw you through the window. Don't you suppose I know the spot where they found Davey? I know exactly where it is, where your little brother drowned. And just now, you swam to that place, and you swam back again!"

The boy could not speak. He stood transfixed, his tanned, well-muscled body clean and still gleaming from the water.

The man's face had grown even paler as he spoke. It was a wet clammy pallor, composed of equal parts of horror and perspiration. The eyes spelled a hatred that the boy could read.

"Dad!" The boy screamed finally, the cry of a wounded animal. He rushed to the man, threw himself at him, encircled him with groping arms.

"Dad, I love you. Whatever you think of me, I love you." The words came sobbing out of him, as he clawed and hugged his father, and struggled to prove his words by the strength of his embrace.

But the man was stronger. He seized the boy's arms in his big hands, and thrust the smaller body away from his own. The boy's feet slipped on the puddle-wet dock and he fell.

"What are you going to do with me, Dad?" he asked, without daring to move.

The man's voice was toneless and dead when he answered. "That's what I've been trying to decide," he said and turned away to stare out at the lake.

Not even then, and not till minutes later, did the boy venture to lift himself up. His father paid no attention to him. So he trudged silently back to the house.

He did not eat any breakfast. Instead he lurked at the window. He saw his father continue to stand motionless, hands thrust deeply into his pockets, his gaze fixed, never straying from the lake. He saw too the gathering of the clouds and the disappearance of the sun, and at last the rain itself, which began softly, stealthily, scarcely more than a drizzle at first.

It was the rain which finally impelled the boy to action. He saw his father oblivious to it, standing in it, getting chilly and wet. For with the arrival of the rain, the air had cooled. The boy felt the change on his near naked body.

So he left the house finally and went part of the way down toward the dock. From a distance of twenty feet or more he called out, "Dad, come inside."

The man turned to face him, but made no move to come in. "We're

going out in the boat," he announced.

"But, Dad, it's raining and getting colder."

"You wanted a boat ride, didn't you?" The words came clipped, fierce, unarguable. "Well, that's what we're going to do . . . Bring down the motor."

The boy was puzzled, but he obeyed. The man let him do everything. He bailed with a tin can. He carried down the heavy outboard motor. He brought the fuel can, filled and primed the motor, got it started.

"Ready to go, Dad."

"You in front, Paul."

The man steered. The course he followed was perpendicular to the shoreline, and they ran at full speed. The rain pursued them. The boy shivered a little, but it was mere reflex, and he was not conscious of it. They rode almost to the middle of the lake, and there the man stopped the motor. Their world, which had been so full of rasping sound, became suddenly and completely quiet. The boy looked about him. The water was clear and unobstructed, the boat being the only visible object on its surface. He looked then to his father. They regarded each other across six feet of silence.

"How far from our dock would you say we are?" The question came suddenly, from nowhere.

It surprised the boy, but he looked around calmly before he answered. "Almost a quarter of a mile."

"Davey was a hundred yards offshore when he drowned. If you could have swum in with him that day, it would be about equal to swimming from here to our dock, wouldn't it?"

The boy was thinking, and he spoke very solemnly. "A swimmer who could swim in from here ought to be able to pull in a drowning person from a hundred yards."

The man nodded. "There's been a question about how far you can swim, Paul. We'll settle it now. Get into the water."

His father was acting very strangely and the boat was small, so the boy seemed almost glad to escape its narrowness. He slipped over the side easily, disappearing briefly beneath the surface, then coming up again. Shrugging moisture from his eyes, he looked to his father for instructions.

"Go ahead, Paul. See if you can make it to our dock."

The boy turned away quickly, put his face into the water, and began to swim. He started strongly, as if pursued, making great splashes with his flailing arms.

The man watched the swimmer for a little while. Finally he started the motor. The boat quickly overtook the boy. By throttling the motor to idling speed, the man was able to keep just abreast of the swimmer.

They had covered perhaps a third of the distance to shore, moving thus together, when the boy stopped. His head bobbing up and down, now

above, now under the surface, he began to tread water. The boat pulled slowly away from him.

"You're only pretending you're tired, Paul," the man called out.

Stung by the rebuke, the boy commenced swimming again, with greater effort even than before. For a few seconds he managed to gain on the boat. But he could not maintain such a pace. He began once more to fall behind. The great splashes he made, and which marked his progress so well, diminished quickly in size and vigor.

The man watched intently. Once he dipped a hand into the water. The coldness of it surprised him. But its surface, except for the imprint of the rain and the foaming course of the swimmer, was smooth and untroubled. The boat continued toward the dock, and the interval between it and the boy lengthened.

Man and boat were more than two-thirds of the way to their destination when the call first came. It was clear and certain, a single, shrill, piercing word carrying across the water.

"Help!"

The splashes were there, but they were moving slowly. So the man did not turn the boat, nor did he cut the motor.

"Dad, help!"

The man craned his neck to look. He blinked against the rain, which was coming down quite heavily now. He could not see too well, but he was nevertheless sure that he still saw the splashes.

"Dad, come back!"

But the splashes were there . . .

When the boat reached the dock, the man moored it, and climbed out. He stood there then, and faced toward the lake, watching still. The splashes were not more than fifty yards away, and they were still coming closer.

But quite suddenly they stopped. A hand reached out of the water, groping upward, grasping air. When it disappeared, the lake closed over it, and the rain came down.

He knew the truth then, because he got back in the boat and raced it furiously to that empty place on the water. And he circled round and round it, till the motor ran out of fuel and the boat began to drift aimlessly.

And he kept calling into the unresponsive depths, "Paul . . . Paul . . . son . . . my son . . ."

Cal saw the girl, and he knew what was going to happen. He knew he couldn't stop himself.

One of a Kind

BY BEN SMITH

CAL HARBY sat quite motionless on the piece of driftwood, gazing through the screen of willows at the girl on the deck of the houseboat. He moistened his lips slowly, staring unblinkingly at the undulating fullness of the breasts against the thin dress, and then the girl turned suddenly and disappeared inside the cabin.

For almost a full minute after she was gone, Cal remained as motionless as he had been before; then he reached down to untie the knotted cotton strings that had long since taken the place of his shoelaces.

"Jesus," he whispered softly to himself.

Then, carrying his shoes in his hand, he moved silently toward the plank that led to the houseboat, a tall, ragged man with a four-day beard and tangled, wheat-like hair. He hid his shoes beneath a bush at the river's edge, looked both ways to make sure no one was watching him, and then ran silently up the plank and across the deck to the open cabin doorway.

The girl was lying on a pallet, her body covered by a sheet. There was no outcry; she simply sat upright and drew the sheet up to cover her bare breasts.

Cal glanced about the cabin, then stepped inside and leaned back against the wall.

"Where's your man?" he asked.

The girl touched her upper lip with the tip of her tongue, and Cal wondered at the coolness in the depths of her eyes. There was no fear there. None at all. And that was strange, because there should have been. There always had been, in the other women's eyes. Fear and a sort of speculation.

"I asked you where your man was," he said.

She shifted her position slightly. "He's over in the town," she said. "The one just beyond the hill."

"What's your name, girl?"

"Susan."

He nodded. "Susan. That's a real pretty name."

She drew the sheet a little higher. "My man always thought so."

"Your man, hell. You ain't got no man."

"I —"

He stepped close to her, smiling a little now. "I said you ain't got no man." Then, in one quick movement, he was on the floor beside her, one leg thrown across hers, hands pinioning her arms beneath the sheet.

But she was stronger than he'd thought. She got one arm loose, and as the sheet slipped down about her waist she raked her nails swiftly across Cal's face. The wiriness of his beard defeated her, but she struck again, and this time her nails sliced his lip at the corner of his mouth.

She watched, body rigid, while he licked the blood away; and then, as he leaned over her again, her hooked fingers clawed viciously at his ear.

With one hand Cal ripped the sheet the rest of the way from her body and flung it away from them. He felt the warmth against the side of his face and knew she had torn his ear, but the pain was lost beneath the greater urgency of the pain he had felt from the first moment he saw her. It had been like this with the other women, too —

but not this strong, not this wonderful.

Later, when it was cooler and the sun no longer slanted through the window, Cal propped himself up on one elbow to look at Susan. She had retrieved the sheet and was now covered except for one brown leg. She was looking toward him, but her eyes were fathomless.

"You was right," she said quietly. "I ain't got a man."

Cal grinned and rolled over on his stomach. "I knew it," he said. "No man with good sense would ever leave the likes of you alone." He listened to the sound of the water lapping at the sides of the houseboat. "Your man dead?"

"Three months now," she said. "He fell in the river. It was right in the middle of a storm. They found him washed up on the bank about six miles from here." She paused. "He was swelled up so bad they couldn't find his belt." She pushed the sheet aside and sat up. "You hungry? There's cold cornbread and catfish in the cabinet."

Cal shook his head. "No, I ain't hungry. Probably will be later, though." He glanced about the cabin again. "What do you do, all by yourself?"

"I work in town some. And there's always food in the river. All you got to do is bait a hook." She stood up and reached for her dress. "You do much fishing?"

"There ain't much of it up where I come from," he said. "Too many factories around Toledo, I guess. It kind of riles the water."

"It's a good way to earn a living, and sometimes a little extra. And I've got a shotgun, so you could do some hunting too. There's everything you need here."

Cal got to his feet. "I don't much think I'd like it," he said, grinning down at her. "I guess I'm hungry, after all." He turned to the cabinet. "You say you got some catfish?"

"Sure." She opened one of the cabinet doors. "There's plenty. I cut up a spoonbill, and it'll spoil."

He ate slowly, jaw muscles working thoughtfully beneath the beard. This, too, was like the other times — the feeling of discontent, the sickening letdown after the good thing was over. He put the fish back in the cabinet and closed the door. Out on the river a nightbird called, and then the sound faded to nothing and the river was still.

He had almost forgotten the girl, but now he heard her make a soft sound in her throat and he turned to face her. She was lying on the pallet. She said nothing, but there was no need; the invitation was in her eyes, in the way she had arranged her body.

Cal gazed at her a moment, then turned away. It was no good, he knew. A woman was no good unless you had her in violence. Without violence and pain and the nearness of death, a woman was no good at

all. He had had Susan that way once, and it had been good, but there could be no second time. The violence had flared, and death had been near, but now they had passed and they would not come again.

Not with Susan. With some other girl the feeling would come soon enough, and the violence and the blood. But not with Susan.

He looked toward the door. "I ought to move on," he said.

Susan stared at him a long time; then she shrugged, rose, and came to stand close to him.

"The law's after you, ain't it?" she asked.

"I didn't say that."

"You don't have to. It sticks out all over you." She moved close to him. "You can hide here. I can hide you."

"I can't," he said. And he thought, I have to move on. I have to keep going from one girl to another, or it's no good.

He stepped from the cabin. The freshness of the night breeze touched his cheek and stirred the sodden, uncut hair. Somewhere out on the black river a fish jumped, and the sound was like the slap of a palm against a face.

"Well . . ." Cal said. "I guess I'll be moving." He placed his bare foot on the sagging gangplank, still warm from the sun, and moved slowly down it toward the bank.

"Don't go," Susan said.

He paused. "I got to. The law . . ."

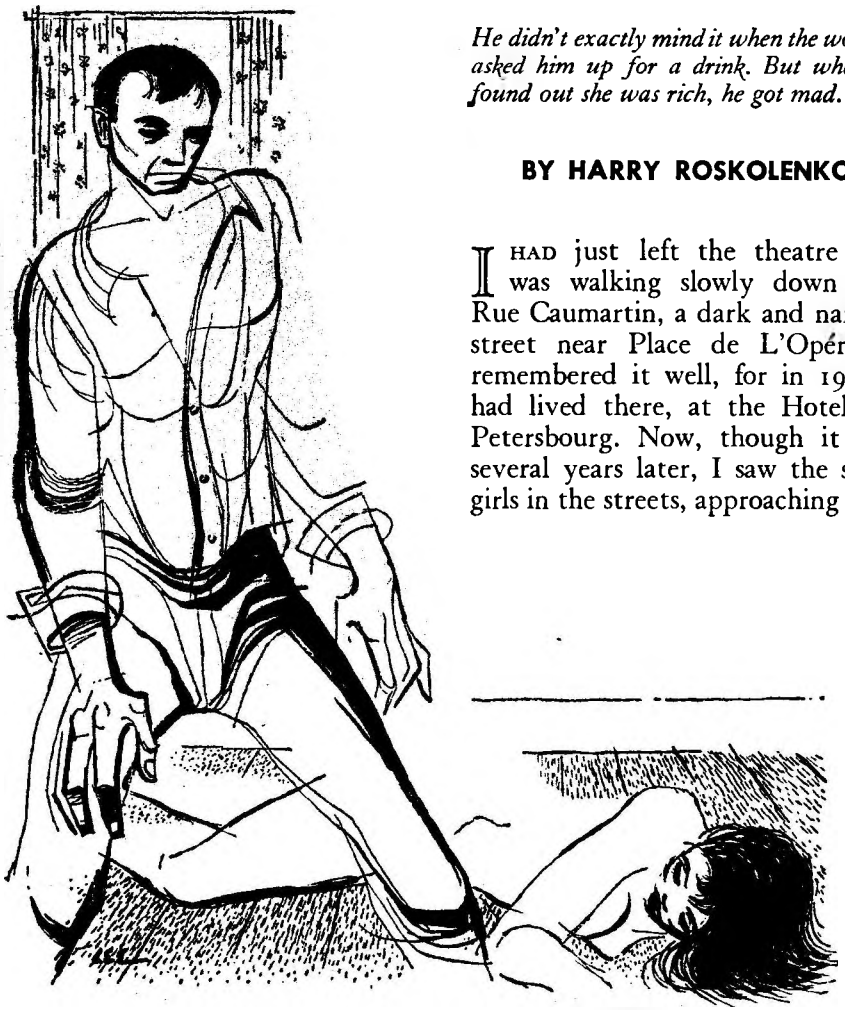
"But why?" she asked. "Why . . .?"

"It was rape," Cal said. He turned to face her, and now he saw the dull sheen of the shotgun in her arms. Suddenly the night was filled with flame and sound and he felt the pressure of a giant hand against his chest, knocking him off the gangplank and into the ooze of the river bank.

Through the fog that swirled abruptly across his mind he could see Susan. She had cast off the line, and as the current caught the houseboat and bore it downstream, she stripped the dress from her body, ripping at it with impatient hands, her eager face turned toward Cal with the ecstatic look of a woman in the moment of final and complete response to her lover.

And in that moment, as he lay dying, Cal Harby knew he had at last met one of his own kind.

The Famous Actress



He didn't exactly mind it when the woman asked him up for a drink. But when he found out she was rich, he got mad.

BY HARRY ROSKOLENKO

I HAD just left the theatre and was walking slowly down the Rue Caumartin, a dark and narrow street near Place de L'Opéra. I remembered it well, for in 1947 I had lived there, at the Hotel St. Petersbourg. Now, though it was several years later, I saw the same girls in the streets, approaching men

with exactly the same suggestions and gestures they had used when I first saw them. Even their walk and their tone of voice were precisely as I remembered them.

I turned off on a side street, to get to the métro. I saw her then. A beautiful, lush-bodied woman in her early thirties, walking down the middle of the street. I had learned long ago that this was significant. To walk down the middle of the street meant that the lady was not a prostitute, and was not to be accosted. The prostitutes strolled on the sidewalks, took over all the legitimate footpaths. The good women walked in the gutter.

I thought it was strange that such a beautiful, conservatively dressed woman should be out at this hour, when I had expected to see only harlots, and I peered at her closely. Then I noted that, like myself, she was carrying a theatre program.

As our paths crossed, she paused and said, "Ah! You have come from the theatre?" She spoke in a fair English, with the usual gentle lilt of the French.

"Yes," I said. "I have just seen Langlois spoil a very fine play by hamming it up."

She laughed at the word "hamming." "But that is not so! Langlois is a great actor. It is a terrible thing to say, Monsieur."

"Is it? Well, maybe so. I'm afraid I can't give a professional opinion on it. I'm not in the theatre."

"But I am," she said. "I mean, I'm a secretary. I work in the theatre. I type plays and handle correspondence, and in that way I know things from the bottom up — from the very bottom."

So she was an expert. I bowed to her. "That's different," I said, more enchanted by her speech than by her views. "Would you like to have a drink? There's a nice bar on Rue Caumartin, near the Hotel St. Petersbourg."

She smiled, took my arm, and we walked back toward the bar.

A few minutes later, as we sat drinking our brandies, she said, "Today has been a sad one. I went to the funeral of Charles Dullin."

"I've heard a lot about him," I said. "A great teacher. Jean-Louis Barrault studied with him. He told me about Dullin's death."

"Then you know Barrault?"

"Not very well," I said. "I'm an American journalist, and I interviewed him for a couple of hours, but that's all."

"Ah! Then you are my friend. Barrault is a great actor!"

There seemed to be something of the actress in this lovely woman. And why else should she go to Dullin's funeral? Her apparently intimate knowledge of him would hardly come from being just a secretary. Then I realized I was probably imagining things, and shrugged the thought away. This woman was much too fresh to be an actress, despite her avid interest in the theatre.

She smoked my cigarettes and talked about literature. But I found my eyes returning again and again to the low bodice of her dress, and I was much more interested in her than in her opinions.

Her name, she told me finally, was Mlle. Francine Dejourbet. Her voice was rich, her face mobile, and every movement of her body was accomplished in a way that conveyed subtle meanings and added certain nuances to her words.

I realized suddenly it was growing late, and glanced at my watch. "I'm sorry," I said. "I'll have to leave. I live on the Left Bank, and I'm supposed to meet a friend."

She smiled. "Then you can take me to the métro."

We left the bar and walked along Rue Caumartin until we reached the cross street where I had met her. The streets were deserted now, the prostitutes having quit for the night. We moved into a deeper darkness. I felt her hand jerk in mine. It was a cat running across our path. I put my right arm around her to steady her. Her body, beneath the thin material of her dress, was firm and warm. I felt her press against me, and then I held her more tightly and began kissing her. To my surprise, she responded, her mouth open, her body undulating insistently against mine.

The kiss must have lasted nearly a minute. Then I said, "Can't we go somewhere, Francine?"

She was breathing rapidly. "Of course we can. I know a place." She paused. "Will you be nice to me?"

I looked at her sharply. I had been so sure she wasn't a prostitute, so *damned* sure . . . "What do you mean?" I asked.

"I mean, will you give me something? Some money?"

I moistened my lips, staring at her.

"You see," she continued quietly, "I do not earn enough to live. One night, every two weeks, I must go walking. Of course, I am very careful. I am very selective. It helps me, when I find a nice man, to live — until my employer pays me again."

I understood then. She wasn't a full-time prostitute, like the others along the streets. She was that half-and-half type Paris is so full of. I knew that many shopgirls, secretaries, even married women, prostituted themselves one night every week or so, to keep going. Just one night, and then back to respectability.

I sensed that she was something special. A serious woman who was just a little short of money — but not a prostitute.

Yet the hotel she took me to was professional enough, and business was apparently very good. Francine knew how to go about getting a room, and the desk clerk scarcely glanced at us.

Even the way Francine took off her clothes showed training. She did it with a provocative grace

almost as exciting as the exquisite body she so slowly revealed. She had upthrust breasts and long tapering legs, and an incredibly tiny waist that flared abruptly into ripe round hips. She was breathtaking.

And she knew everything. Every act of the bedroom.

But I became convinced, the more abandoned we became, that she was posing, acting out something — that she could not possibly be the Francine Dejourbet she claimed to be.

When she went into the bathroom, I picked up her handbag. She had thousands of francs — almost 50,000. Obviously, her story about needing money had been a lie. A gold compact lay at the bottom, as well as several keys with silver inlays. There was also a picture of Charles Dullin, inscribed, "*To Georgette.*" I looked further, and found a *Carte d'Identite.* It bore the same name as the picture — Georgette.

I put the bag back.

She came in, singing a number I recognized as one she had done in a show. She stopped quickly, however, when she saw I was listening and made an attempt to disguise her fine voice. She was on stage, I realized, in a little bedroom farce, a comedy of morals, of manners, of disguises, of other names, of sex . . .

She lay beside me and suggested we do something different. We did. I got the feeling it was a huge searching for experience on her part. Even the lie about being a secretary was part of it, another role to be assumed and played for my benefit. And so was that business about not having enough money to live on and being required to prostitute herself one night every two weeks. It was all part of the picture.

Finally we lay back, exhausted, and lit cigarettes.

I thought about her. A famous actress, a beautiful woman with a bag stuffed with money, playing the role of a prostitute. Tonight her theatre was this miserable little hotel room. It had to be that kind of room, of course, small and dirty and used by one harlot after another.

God, I thought, what a drama.

Suddenly she glanced at the table beside the bed and noticed that her handbag was open. In my excitement I had forgotten to close it.

She looked at me accusingly. "You would do *that?* You would take money from me?"

"Listen —" I began.

"You thief!"

"I'm not a thief. I don't give a damn about your money. I was just curious about who you really were."

She raised up on one elbow. "But why? I have already told you that I am —"

"That's just it," I said. "You're not Francine Dejourbet, whoever she is."

"You think I am her — this woman?" She was staring at the photograph with the inscription, "*To Georgette.*"

I nodded.

"You think I look like her?"

"You are her."

She moistened her lips. "And — and if I say I found this handbag tonight, and that it is only a coincidence that she and I look somewhat alike, what would you say to that?" She was smiling now, looking at me through her lashes.

"I'd say you were inventing too much — even for a famous actress. You might as well cut it out. I know you're Georgette." I got up and started to put my clothes back on. As I was buckling my belt, she ran to me and put her arms around my neck.

"You cannot go!" she said. "You're a journalist. You'll write a story. I know you will! You must listen to me! Please! Listen to me!"

"I won't be writing a story," I said.

"I will pay you to forget me — to forget who I am!"

"Thanks, but I'm not interested in your money."

"I am not a prostitute," she said. "You know why I do this?"

I looked at her, knowing what I would do in a few moments — the thing I had done so often before and that, after tonight, I would do again and again. And I understood how it was with her, because I, too, was an actor — of a sort.

"Tell me," I said softly.

"It is because I can never have the same man twice," she said. "That is my unhappiness — my peculiarity. My fire must always be fed by a new flame." Her eyes searched my face. "Do you understand? For me, it is a matter of a new audience every time."

I stood quite still, staring at her, remembering the other times. The first time, the time that had made me a fugitive from the United States. The second time, when the Mexican police had almost caught me. The third, and fourth, and fifth times, and then the sixth time, here in Paris, less than a week ago. I thought about the others and I knew this would be no different.

"I will not write a story, Georgette," I said. "I was an American journalist, yes, but no more. I went to a room with a woman one night, and we made love, just as you and I have done. Then I killed her. I choked her to death. I don't know why."

Georgette's eyes widened, and the tip of her tongue came out to touch her upper lip.

"You — you are insane!" she whispered.

"Yes," I said. "Like you. And, like you, I must have a new audience every time. You see, once a woman becomes my audience, she dies."

"You are insane!" she said again, and then opened her mouth wider to scream.

But my hands were already on her throat, and she did not scream.

She made no sound at all until I dropped her lifeless body to the floor.

Portrait of a Killer

No. 14 — Albert Van Dyke

BY DAN SONTUP

A MAN can't live on $30 a month, but that's all that ex-G.I. Albert Van Dyke got in the way of a pension from the government. So, he tried to supplement his income, first by handling stolen cars and then, finally, by robbing and killing his grandmother.

Albert didn't do too well in either attempt to make more money. He was picked up for driving a stolen car across a state line, was tried, convicted, and sentenced to a term in prison in Reno, Nevada. His income now was considerably less than $30 a month.

After a while, he was transferred from Reno to the Medical Center of the Missouri Federal Penitentiary, and he served out the rest of his sentence there. At his discharge, he was issued the usual clothing, including an overcoat. He didn't like the overcoat: it was too short for him, and it reminded him too much of his days in prison. But Albert had no money with which to buy a new overcoat, and he had to keep it — until he found a way to trade it and make a few dollars on the side.

He was sitting in a bar one night when another man with an almost new overcoat came in and sat down next to him. Albert looked at the man and at his overcoat, and it didn't take long before both of them were talking to each other over their drinks. Albert waited until the right moment and then put a strange proposition to the man — did he want to trade overcoats? A lot of odd things can happen when men drink and talk in a bar, and Albert left the tavern with the other man's overcoat and $5 extra which the man had paid him for trading coats.

The $5 didn't last Albert very long, of course, and even the new overcoat couldn't make up for the fact that he was broke again. In looking about for a way to make some money, Albert remembered his grandmother, who lived in a small town in Missouri. Albert never had been on close terms with his family, but he figured that the old woman might be good for a touch, and so he started on his way to find her.

It was one o'clock in the morning by the time he finally reached the town where Mrs. Harding, his grandmother, lived. She was a woman in her sixties, and she lived all alone in a small house — and she seldom bothered to lock the door, since

everyone in the neighborhood knew her and knew she didn't have much money or anything else worth stealing.

The door was unlocked when Albert got there, and he walked right in. His grandmother was in bed, and Albert went into her bedroom, woke her up, and told her he was broke and needed money. Mrs. Harding was not only surprised to see Albert, but she was also understandably indignant at the way in which he had stormed into her home at night and demanded money. She told him she didn't have any money and refused to have anything to do with him.

Albert wasn't impressed. He told her again that he wanted money, and she refused him once more. A vicious argument started, but it didn't last very long. Albert, in a blind rage, grabbed a pair of scissors from the table and lunged at his grandmother with them.

He plunged the scissors into Mrs. Harding's chest, then raised them again and again, stabbing her in the throat and face. When he finally stopped, his grandmother was dead, and Albert's new overcoat and the bed — in which Mrs. Harding lay — were covered with blood.

When he caught his breath, Albert dropped the scissors and took his grandmother's pocketbook from the dresser and dumped the contents out. He found only ten dollars there.

It wasn't much of a price to collect for a killing, but then Albert was used to small amounts. He pocketed the money and then set about trying to hide the crime as best he could. His grandmother's bed was near a window that had no shade. This meant that, since the room was on the ground floor, people could see inside — and they might see Mrs. Harding's body on the bed. So, Albert dragged his grandmother's body from the bed, pulled her across the floor into another bedroom, and then shoved her body close to the bed. He looked down at her in order to make sure that she was really dead. She seemed to be, but just to make certain, Albert went into the kitchen, found some rope, and then came back and knotted it around his grandmother's throat and pulled it as tight as he could. After this, he covered the body with some quilts from the bed.

Going back into the murder room, Albert noticed that the sheets on the bed were covered with blood. Someone might be able to see this from the window, so he proceeded to make up the bed quite carefully and neatly. Then, taking a sheet and some rags, he wiped up all the bloodstains on the floor in the bedroom and along the path where he had dragged the body. That took care of the blood on the floor, but there was still plenty of blood on Albert and on his new overcoat.

He washed up at the sink and then tried to get the bloodstains out of the coat. It didn't work: he

couldn't wash all the blood off, and Albert knew that the police would be able to find bloodstains there no matter how hard he washed it. He had to get rid of the coat, and the most logical way was to burn it. He started to do this, but the smoke from the burning cloth got into his eyes, and Albert put the coat in the sink and let the water run over it until it stopped smoking and burning.

Albert looked at the soggy and charred coat, and then he remembered that it wasn't his coat, that he had traded his old coat for it with the man in the bar. To Albert's way of thinking, this meant the police never could trace the coat to him, and so he dumped it and the sheet and the rags in a box and hid the scissors on the back porch and then left the house.

Albert had a lot of time to make his getaway. It took three days before anyone missed Mrs. Harding enough to investigate, and by this time Albert was well on his way to Denver.

The police found the coat and started a routine investigation. Through laundry marks, they were able to trace the coat to the man with whom Albert had traded in the bar. The man, when questioned by the police, admitted that it was his coat and told them of the trade he had made with Albert and showed them the coat that Albert had given him. It didn't take long after that for the police to check some serial numbers in the lining and trace the coat back to the prison records, which showed that the coat had been issued to Albert when he was discharged from prison. After that, it was just a matter of hunting him down, and he was arrested less than two months after the discovery of the body of Mrs. Harding.

Albert pleaded guilty to a charge of second-degree murder and was sentenced to life in prison. His effort to make extra money had failed miserably.

He had gained $15 in cash and had lost two overcoats — and his freedom.

NIGHT was black: a starry oblong framed within the open window. No breeze stirred. It was hot: summer-hot, city-hot, breathless. Night came through the open window, peaceful night, merging with the breathing in the room: soft, inter-mingled breathing: relaxed now, deep and hushed. Motionless, I lay on my back, my hands clasped behind my head, the sweat on my body not uncomfortable, and I viewed

Candlestick

Peter Chambers didn't like answering the phone at three in the morning. Especially when the caller told him about a murder . . .

A Complete Peter Chambers Novel

BY HENRY KANE

the tranquil oblong of night as though it were a picture hung on my bedroom wall. The swirl of conscious thinking was subdued: mine was the twilight phase between wakefulness and dreaming. It was pleasant, summer-hot-pleasant, early nighttime in the city, the room dark but not pitch dark — no room in the middle of the city is ever pitch dark — the lights of the city bunch to a faint luminous cloudiness: it was dim.

The ringing of the phone was a raucous intrusion. I reached for it on the first ring, and held a palm over the mouthpiece. There was a disturbed stirring beside me, then nothing, no movement, only the gentle rhythmic breathing. I lifted the phone to my mouth, whispered: "Yes?"

"Pete?"

"Yes."

"Parker."

"Yes, Lieutenant?"

"I want you to come over to Max Keith's place."

"Keith?"

"Right away."

"Why?"

"Business."

"Business? Like what?"

"Like murder."

I kept the receiver close to my ear. I said, "Why you calling me, Lieutenant?"

"Tell you when I see you. You coming, or do I send for you?"

"I'm coming."

"You know where it is?"

"Yes."

"How soon, Pete?"

"Ten minutes. It's near enough."

"Good boy, fella. Thanks."

There was a click and the connection was dead. I replaced the receiver and slid out of bed. I brought my clothes to the living room, flicked a glance at the clock. It was 11:10. Murder, Parker had said. It hadn't excited me — blood doesn't excite a surgeon. Violent death is a constant item in my affairs, part of my stock in trade. Max Keith, Parker had said. But we hadn't gone into it. It had been, perforce, a laconic conversation: pithy. Pithy. What a word. Was Max Keith the murderer, or the murdered, or had murder occurred in the presence of Max Keith? I'd find out soon enough.

I dressed rapidly and quietly, grabbed a quick eye-opener, snatched a cigarette, and went to the bedroom door. "Okay," I said. "Okay in there." There was a rustle of movement, then the usual harsh-soft gargling sounds of unpleased awakening. Distinctly I said: "Go home. Do you hear? Go home now, right now. It's very important. Go home. At once."

2.

Max Keith, fair-haired boy of his profession, guiding genius of Keith Associates. Max Keith, press-agent. There are other names: publicists, promotional attorneys, pub-

licity counsellors, exploitation engineers, press relations advisers — the appellations grow more esoteric in direct ratio to the size of the fees and the importance of the clients. Max Keith did not go in for flights of fancy. Beneath the gold block letters spelling out *Keith Associates* on the entrance door of his sumptuous offices in Rockefeller Plaza appeared, in smaller gold block letters, the simple legend: *Public Relations Counsellors.* This counselling, mystical as it may be, afforded him a tremendous income, a reputation as a big-spending playboy, an ever-changing retinue of resplendent females, and a penthouse apartment on Park Avenue: 600 Park Avenue, to be exact.

Max Keith was about forty-five years of age, tall, slim, chipper, charming, well-tailored, well-mannered, and slightly supercilious. He was effusively greeted in the night clubs, he was a member in good standing of the best after-hours bottle clubs in the city, and the perkiest of the damozels of the evening perked at their most incandescent in his presence. It was rumored that he had recently been engaged, or was about to be engaged: I didn't know, and I didn't care. I'd heard that he'd been married once, a long time ago, and then divorced. His engagement — or his impending engagement — came as somewhat of a shock to those within his social circle and filtered through to me: Max Keith was so much the perfect bachelor. Personally, his charm was lost on me. I had done a little job of work for him, once, and it had thrown us together for about a week. I had seen him silken and mush-mouthed, and I'd seen him brutal and short: his personality was an elastic as an actor's age. He was a tough man to figure, and it was neither my job nor inclination to figure him: so I let it lie. As a matter of fact, I had only this day turned down a short assignment he had proffered. It had conflicted with a date, and the date had been more important.

600 Park Avenue was a narrow twelve-story white-faced building near Sixty-fourth Street, ten minutes from where I live, which is Central Park South and Sixth Avenue. I paid the cabbie, pulled open a heavy wrought-iron glass-backed door, and pushed the button adjacent to *Keith* in the beautifully clean marble vestibule. A voice croaked through the intra-edifice telephonic system: "Yeah? Who is it?"

"Chambers. Peter Chambers."

"Who?"

I shoved my lips close to the round sieve-like brass appurtenance set squash in the middle of the push-button-and-name apparatus attached to the wall. "Chambers," I yelled. "Peter Chambers."

"Okay," came the metallic retort. "Don't holler for Chrissake. Okay." Then there was a sound-off irking click, and then the buzzer on the inner door set up a rasp. I

pushed through a second wrought-iron heavy glass-backed door, this with shirred curtains backing the glass-backing, and I went to one of two automatic elevators, flicked a finger at the top button, and floated upward soundlessly.

The door to Max Keith's apartment was open, and a uniformed cop was holding it open. "Chambers?" he said.

"Yeah."

"Come in."

I went through, and he remained stationed at the door.

First there was a little foyer, and then there was a large foyer, and then there was an enormous drawing room peopled by six busy males, one languorous female, and one cadaver, very male and very dead. I recognized three of the busy males, all out of Homicide: Detective-lieutenant Louis Parker; Detective-sergeant Bob Fleetwood, a great fingerprint man; and Detective-sergeant Carl Walsh, an ace photographer. I recognized the cadaver: Max Keith, his head pulpy and part of his face thick-covered with drying blood — and I assumed the man-near-the-little-black-bag who was kneeling near him was a doctor from the Medical Examiner's office. I did not know the languorous female. She was in a far corner of the room, talking to Parker. She was a tall blonde with petulant eyes and a rose-bud mouth. She was stacked inside of a gold party-dress, and stacked is the word. The dress billowed on bottom and pouted on top. The arms were bare, the back was bare, and most of the chest was bare, uptilted and milk-white. The petulant eyes were blue, the blonde hair piled-on-head in a complex shining coiffure, and the small rose-bud mouth kept being sucked in, the lower lip bitten.

One of the men whom I did not recognize looked up, hat on head, from an inspection of the drawers of a huge carved-glinting desk, said, "Yeah? What's with you?"

Parker detached himself from the languorous blonde. "It's all right," he said. "He's for me."

"All yours, Lieutenant." He went back to his examination of the contents of the drawers.

Parker came to me, said, "Hi," took my arm, led me to the blonde, said, "You two know each other?"

The blue eyes were cool, puckering as they appraised me. "Never had the pleasure," she said.

I said, "My loss."

There seemed to be a smile in back of the eyes. "Were you a friend of . . . of . . ." The eyes skimmed to the center of the room where the body lay, then came back to me.

"An employee," I said. "On occasion. Piece work."

"Oh." Now there was no smile. Expression retreated. The blue eyes were blue eyes: opaque, remote, disinterested.

Parker said: "Ruth Rollins. Peter Chambers."

"How do you do?"

"How do you do?"

Parker said, "Will you excuse us for a few minutes, Miss Rollins?" She moved to a chair, sat down, extended a hand to a cigarette box, placed the cigarette between her lips. Parker lit it for her. "Just a few moments," he said, touching my elbow, leading me through an archway into a smaller room, a study, the walls book-lined, the furniture of deep-red leather.

"Why me?" I said.

"Two reasons. This is the first." He dug a hand into his jacket pocket and brought out a torn-out sheet of a desk diary and handed it to me. The date was today. Beneath that, two items were scrawled in black pencil: *Peter Chambers* — and further down on the sheet — *Brad Hartley, 7:30.*

"This is from his desk pad," Parker said. "Here at home."

I returned the sheet. I said, "What happened?"

"We don't know yet, practically just got here. Given the place a thorough look-see, and that's about all."

"But you know something."

"We know he's dead. We know his head was bashed in. With a candlestick, a gold candlestick."

"Gold candlestick. Nothing but the best for Max Keith."

"Look, who's asking the questions here, anyway?"

"Let me do it for a while, then we switch."

"Well, do it fast."

"Okay. Same question. What happened?"

"We got a call about five after eleven. We came here. And we found him. The boys are giving it the business. That's it."

"Where do I come in?"

"Smack square on his desk was his calender-diary with that sheet on top. I figured I'd have you in right at the beginning. Like I said, two reasons. One. This sheet. Two. You once handled some business of his."

"How do you know?"

"Entry in his books here at home. One week's work. Fifty dollars a day — three hundred and fifty dollars. Two things about that one. One. What was the work about? Two. You can sort of give us a rundown on the guy. Who, better than you? You were with him for a week. When?

"Six months ago."

"Okay. Let's hear."

"Easy does it, Lieutenant. You want three hunks. One, the desk item of today. Two, the item about six months ago. Three, a character analysis as only Chambers can deliver. All I want is one hunk: what happened?"

He grinned, nudged knuckles under my chin. "This Ruth Rollins, she's engaged to him. She was here, with a little group. She left at ten o'clock. As per previous appointment, she returned here at eleven. The door was ajar."

"How'd she get in . . . downstairs?"

The grin was wider. "She's got keys."

"Like that?"

"So it seems. Anyway, according to her, the door was ajar up here. She came in and found him like that, dead on the floor, the candlestick near. She fainted, came to, called us."

"Then what?"

"Then nothing. We arrive, en masse. The dame is slightly hysterical. I put the boys to work, and I work on getting her into shape. I also call you. You arrive. I've got her simmered down. That's it, right up to now."

"You didn't question her at all?"

"Only the quickies. We practically only just got here, remember?"

"Then maybe you ought to go back to work. My stuff'll keep. I'm here — for as long as you want me. First things first, Lieutenant."

"Okay. But just for now — do you know why your name is down on his desk pad for today?"

"Yes."

"Spill that."

"He called my office this afternoon. He wanted my services. Just for this evening."

"Services?"

"Bodyguard."

"You think it had anything to do with this shindig he had here tonight?"

"I wouldn't know. He said it wasn't really important, he'd just like to have me around."

"For how long?"

"He didn't say. Maybe he planned on going out later on. I don't know. I do know that I turned it down."

"Why?"

"I had a previous engagement."

"Business?"

"Social."

The little man with the black bag came in. He said, "Excuse me, Lieutenant. I'm through here."

Parker said, "How's it shape?"

"Dead from a crushing blow on the skull. I'd say there's no doubt that candlestick was the weapon. Fractured skull, probably. Autopsy'll clear that. Time of death coincides with the lady's report — sometime within the last hour or so. Autopsy'll help on that too. Want me to send the wagon up for him?"

"Yes. Do that." The three of us went back into the big drawing room. The little man smiled at everybody and made his exit. Parker said, "Miss Rollins."

The lady looked up.

"I think we'd better chat," Parker said, "in the next room, the study."

"Wherever you wish, Lieutenant." Her hand trembled as she tapped out the cigarette. It was the left hand, and the ring finger gave off at least five carats of blue-white solitary diamond.

The man at the desk came to us with a folded legal-type document. He said, "This ought to interest you, Lieutenant."

"Thanks, Steve." Parker took the paper and then herded us toward the study. I looked back into the

drawing room, watched the activity. Fleetwood was dusting for fingerprints. Walsh was using an assortment of cameras, and flash-bulbs kept exploding. Steve was back at the desk. The other man was stretched on the floor taking measurements. The head of the corpse was covered now with a thin white towel. On a nearby table, also on a white towel, was a long smooth heavy gold candlestick, slightly spotted. There were drinking glasses, some still containing liquor, on various other tables. A liquor cabinet was open, and an ice bucket sat on top of it. I turned away, and joined Parker in the study. Ruth Rollins was seated. Parker was reading the legal document. He handed it to me, and I read it as I listened to him.

He said, "All right, Miss Rollins. Just a little background, please, before we come to the events of this evening."

"Certainly, Lieutenant."

The blue-backed paper I was holding was a will. It was dated this year, two months ago. The attorney was Frank Conaty, 545 Fifth Avenue, New York City. I smiled at that. Frank was the lawyer I had casually recommended to Keith six months ago when he'd mentioned that he'd had a falling out with his own big-dome boys. The will was one page, and simple. It mentioned the fact that his divorced wife had no claims on the estate, had waived all rights as part of a financial agreement drawn up during the time the divorce was pending. Then it bequeathed his entire estate, share and share alike, to two people: Ruth Rollins, and his only living relative, a sister, Julia Keith.

Ruth Rollins was saying: ". . . so, after being adjudged Miss North Carolina, I competed in the Atlantic City national contest, with absolutely no success at all, but it did land me a small movie-starlet contract with Warner's. This was some time ago, please remember. My contract lasted the usual six months — I had no talent in that direction whatever."

"In what direction *did* you have a talent, Miss Rollins?"

I looked at Parker. If he was being sarcastic, it didn't show. Certainly, she took it as a straight question.

"I had become interested in publicity work. I had met a young man who was with the Publicity Department at MGM, and, somehow, he got me a job there. I did very well there, I believe. I remained on the staff for six years. Then, when the economy wave hit, the department was cut to the bone, and I was one of those released. I came east, with a recommendation."

"To whom?"

"To Keith Associates. Mr. Keith employed four major assistants, all men. There was a spot open for a woman who was experienced in the field. One of Mr. Keith's friends on the west coast talked with him on

the phone, talked about me, and when I came to New York, I went to Mr. Keith's office, and after two interviews, I was hired."

"When?" Parker said.

"About five months ago. We became interested in one another, and three months ago we were engaged."

Parker took the paper out of my hands, gave it to her, and waited as she looked it over. He said, "Any idea that you were a beneficiary under his will?"

"Yes," she said. She returned the will. "He told me about it, showed it to me."

"I see. How old are you, Miss Rollins?"

"Twenty-nine."

Maybe. Maybe yes. Maybe no. Twenty-nine is safe. You can be twenty-nine for a long time.

"All right," Parker said. "Let's get to this evening."

"There's nothing much, really. I knew he was going to be home, had some sort of business engagement right here at home. I didn't know with whom. I knew it was set for seven-thirty. At about nine, I decided to drop over, and I did. I found one person here, a Mr. Brad Hartley, a client of Mr. Keith's."

"*The* Brad Hartley?"

"Yes, sir. Of Hartley and Simmons, Investments. Seat on the stock exchange, all that. One of Mr. Keith's big clients. There are nine big clients, in all. These he handled himself. We of the staff took care of the rest of the people."

"So?"

"I had a drink, and I was going to leave, I didn't want to intrude on what I thought was some sort of important deal. But then others dropped in."

"Who?"

"First, Ralph Adams."

"Who is he?"

"One of our staff. The most important one, for that matter. A young man, but oldest in point of service in the firm. There had been some rumors recently of a rift between him and Mr. Keith. Anyway, Ralph dropped in, slightly drunk, slightly sullen. Then came Mr. Keith's sister."

"Julia, isn't it?"

"That's right. She came, bearing a present. That gold candlestick. Mr. Keith hardly looked at it. Julia unwrapped it, put it on the mantelpiece over the fireplace. Nobody even touched it."

"I don't understand."

"There was an embarrassing situation going on just then. Ralph had had a couple of quick drinks, and was beginning to take out his grievances on Mr. Keith, right there in front of Brad Hartley. Keith was dodging, parrying, carrying it off as some sort of rib, and I was helping. That's when Julia arrived. And that's when the candlestick got placed on the mantel, without anybody paying any real attention. Mr. Keith finally disengaged himself from Ralph, told Julia he had something important to say to her, and

they went into this room, the study."

"And what happened to Ralph?"

"I worked him out of the apartment. I got him downstairs, and into a cab. When I came back here, there was an argument raging between Mr. Keith and Julia."

"Where?"

"Here in the study. But we could hear every *loud* remark out in the drawing room. We couldn't hear when they lowered their tones, but we could hear most distinctly when the name-calling took place, and the threats."

"Was *everybody* drunk?"

"I wouldn't say that. Everybody had had a few drinks. Even Julia had helped herself to some creme de menthe on ice."

"What was the argument about?"

"Don't know."

"You said something about threats."

"I don't know if they were really threats. She sounded hysterical. She shouted, once: 'Get away from me. Don't ever come near me, or I'll kill you, I'll kill you, I'll kill you . . .' Then she came rushing out, flew through the drawing room, and left, slamming the door behind her."

"Then?"

"Mr. Keith came out, and I could see he was fighting to control himself. He had a few quick drinks, made a tremendous effort to be cordial, and then, about fifteen minutes later, we left."

"Who?"

"Mr. Hartley and myself."

"What time was that?"

"Ten o'clock."

"You sure of that?"

"Certain. I had looked at my watch, and, tactfully, I hoped, had made a remark about the time. I took Mr. Keith aside and told him I'd be back at about eleven, and he asked me to please do just that."

Parker began pacing, tapping the will against his fingers. "And you came back at eleven. You pushed the downstairs buzzer, there was no answer, so you used the keys you had. Upstairs, you found the door ajar. You came in, and found him, dead on the floor, the candlestick on the floor near him. You fainted. You came to about five minutes later, and you called the police. You didn't touch a thing. That right?"

"That's right."

"Just one more question, Miss Rollins, if you don't mind. It's impertinent, but police, sometimes, must be impertinent."

"What is it, Lieutenant?"

"Can you explain . . . about your having keys . . . to Mr. Keith's apartment?"

She looked up at him, and one eyebrow arched. She said, "There were many times when Mr. Keith was out of town. There are many business papers here. There are also times when he would want to entertain a client. At such times, I would serve as hostess. I mean, if he were out of town, and needed informa-

tion which he kept here; or, if he were out of town, and there might possibly be a client to be entertained at home, at a private dinner party, anything like that — these were a part of my function, and for that reason I had a set of duplicate keys. Of course, I never used them without his permission."

"Except tonight."

"I rang downstairs. I knew he was expecting me. There was no answer. I felt that . . . that perhaps something was wrong. What would you have done in my place?"

"Exactly the same. And were you the only employee who had such a duplicate set of keys?"

"Yes, as far as I know." She smiled, tiredly. "After all, I was also the only employee who also happened to be his fiancée."

"Of course, of course. Now, look, Miss Rollins. I know how unpleasant it is out there, and there's still work to be done . . . so, would you like to rest in one of the bedrooms? We'll call you when we need you."

"Thank you, Lieutenant. You're very kind."

"I'll send a drink in."

"Thanks again."

"What'll it be?"

"Highball. Scotch and soda. A good deal of Scotch and a little soda."

He led her out, toward one of the bedrooms, and I went to the drawing room. Fleetwood winked at me, said, "Looks like a wrap-up." He pointed to a couple of photographs on a table-top. I went near and looked. The photographs were of fingerprints.

Carl Walsh said, "Great new world we live in, ain't it? If you want, pictures get developed and printed practically as soon as you snap them."

The downstairs buzzer rang. Steve answered it.

Parker returned. Fleetwood said, "Lieutenant —"

"Hold it a minute." Parker went to the open liquor cabinet, pointed, inquired: "These glasses clear?"

Fleetwood said, "Yes, sir."

Parker made a highball and handed it to the man who had been taking the measurements. "Stanley, my boy, do the honors for the lady. Miss Rollins. In the bedroom." Stanley started for the doorway. Parker called, "And don't tarry." Stanley disappeared. The other men grinned. Parker said, "Stanley gets ideas. Bedrooms have an effect on him."

Fleetwood began again. "Lieutenant —"

The doorbell rang. It was the litter brigade for the body. Parker supervised. When they were gone, Parker said, "Where's Stanley?"

Steve smiled. "I'll get him."

Parker went to the desk, lifted a sheet. "These the addresses of all the people who were here tonight?"

Walsh said, "Yes, sir. Taken from his address book."

Fleetwood said, "Lieutenant —"

Steve came back with Stanley. Parker pointed. "You. Stanley. Pick up Brad Hartley. Doesn't live far from here. Park Avenue too. 950. Bring him here. Any hitch, call me."

"Yes, sir." Stanley departed.

Fleetwood said, "Now, Lieutenant?"

Parker grinned. "Go ahead, Bob."

"These pictures." Parker crossed to Fleetwood and bent to the photographs. Fleetwood said, "The one on the right is off the candlestick. Only one set of prints on that candlestick. Got that?"

"Yep."

"The one on the left is off the glass that had the green drink. What do you call it?"

"Creme de menthe."

"Yeah. They match. Exactly. No question. That's it."

Parker whistled, rubbed a hand across his mouth. "The little sister, huh? Opportunity, inclination as expressed by threats, even motive, what with a half-share of the estate. It's so open-and-shut, I hate it. But the D.A.'ll eat it up. Steve!"

"Yes, sir."

"Pick up Julia Keith. 10 East 12 Street. Bring her here. Any hitch, call me."

"Yes, sir." Steve went away.

Parker came to me. "All right, let's you and me have a drink, and get ourselves organized."

I smacked my palms together. Parker jumped.

"What the hell's the matter with you?"

"The car."

"Car? What car? And don't ever do that again. It makes me nervous."

"Sorry, Lieutenant. Had a guy, friend of mine, drive me over. Figured I'd just be here a few minutes. Told him to wait. Bet he's still waiting."

"I'll have one of the boys tell him."

"No. I'd rather do it myself. No sense scaring him, a nice ordinary guy. I'll be right up."

Parker shrugged. "Suit yourself."

The policeman opened the door for me, the elevator took me down, and my own two feet hustled me around the corner to Lexington Avenue and the nearest public phone booth. I inserted my coin and dialed PL5–2598. There were three rings, and then the lady's voice answered. I said, "Hi. Pete. You dressed?"

"Yes. Why? What is it?"

"I'm going to talk fast, because you're in a hurry."

"*You're* going to talk fast, because *I'm* in a hurry? You drunk?"

"No. Listen. Pack a bag and get out. But quick. Walk a few blocks and then grab a cab. Check in at the Century. Check in as . . . Mary Hoover. Stay in, have your meals sent up, don't go out. I'll be in touch."

"What's the matter with you? What is this?"

"There's been a murder."

"Murder?"

"Max Keith."

There was a gasp, then no sound.

I called, "Julia, Julia . . ."

Finally she said, "Why? Why am I supposed to run?"

"Because there's a whole mess of facts that stink. Once it gets to the D.A., he'll chew you up. Under any circumstances, you'll be in the clink a long time. There's no bail for murder, and I heard the facts, and no writ'll get you out either. Maybe you can beat it at a trial, there's no question you can, but it's a long time between arrest and trial, and a hotel room is much more comfortable than the pokey. Get going, will you? They're on their way down to pick you up right now."

"But Pete —"

"Do as I tell you. Century. Mary Hoover. Move."

I hung up, pulled a handkerchief, wiped sweat from my face, got out of the phone booth and for the first time I realized I was in a saloon. What could be better? Fortification was in order. I had Scotch twice, chased with water, and then I legged it back to Max Keith's place. Parker was alone with Carl Walsh. I said, "Where's everybody?"

"By everybody," Parker said, "all you can mean is Fleetwood. I sent him after that Ralph Adams, who lives in Queens. Got to get us a quorum. Ever see this joint? All of it?"

"No."

"Seven rooms, counting the terrace. Let me show you. Tour of inspection." He said to Walsh: "You're in charge. Give yourself a drink. Look in on Rollins. Give her a drink. Me and the peeper are going to stroll, then talk. Let's go, Peter Pan."

We started with the terrace. Then back to the drawing room. Then the study. Then a dining room. Then two bedrooms, one of which was occupied by Ruth Rollins. Then a kitchen. Lots of corridors. Then we doubled back, and Parker opened a door, and switched on a light, and I did the double-take his pleased expression was waiting for. It was a large room set up as a little theater, a motion-picture projection room. There were black screens, which were down, covering the windows, and a white motion-picture screen, which was also down like an unfurled roll-up map of the world, and a projection table with a projection machine on it, and a small metal cabinet. There were six rows of jump-seats, like in a movie house, six seats in each row. That's all there was.

I opened the metal cabinet. It was empty.

"Real class," Parker said. "This guy treated himself good. One of his clients was Sam Murray, who used to be with Paramount, now a big private producer. Must have run previews here of the top pictures for house parties. Real Hollywood."

"Why not?" I said. "If the guy could afford it . . ."

"Sure. Sit down, Pete. Time for talk. Let's start at the beginning. How'd you come to know this guy in the first place?"

"The name Julia Keith do anything for you?"

He plucked a cigar from his pocket, bit, spit, champed on to it. "Don't do a thing."

"It's an admission, Lieutenant."

"Of what?"

"Of a lack of appreciation of the arts."

"Arts? What arts?"

"Music. Musical comedies. Operettas."

"Shows, you mean?"

"Yes. I mean something like that."

He grinned around his cigar. "Guy in my business has no time for shows. What's that got to do with Julia Keith?"

"Nothing, except that she's probably the most valuable musical comedy property in the entire City of New York. In the last three years, she was the leading lady in *Sing For Your Supper*, *Student Prince*, and *One Night With You*. Two hits, one flop, but rave reviews for her in all three."

"So?"

"She's Max Keith's sister."

"So?"

"In between shows, she works night clubs."

"So?"

"So that's how I met her. In a night club."

"When?"

"About a year ago."

"So?"

"So, through her, I met Max Keith."

"When?"

"Oh . . . maybe seven-eight months ago."

Parker pushed down a jump-seat, slid into it, motioned to me, and I sat beside him. He said, "All right. What kind of a guy?"

"A prig."

"Prig, huh? That can mean a lot of things. Tell me a few."

"Well, I suppose I've no right to pass judgment. The only real time I spent with him was on that week's work, six months ago. Struck me as a shrewd apple. Fast with a buck, knew all the right people, and knew all the right answers. Classy guy with the dames. On the best of terms with all the big-money party girls. Struck me as the kind of a guy that would throw in his grandmother to make change on a big deal. That kind of a guy. Money, period. A money guy. Chief interest, money. Most minor interest, money. Money, up and down the line. I don't exactly cotton to the type."

"Ever discuss him with sister?"

"Matter of fact, I tried once. She stopped me. Got a slight hunch she didn't particularly cotton to him either. She stopped me cold, asked me as a favor that we keep him out of our conversations. We did. I never mentioned him again, and neither did she."

"And how'd they act together?"

"Like brother and sister. Displayed the usual affections. Nothing more, nothing less."

Parker finally put fire to his cigar. Blue smoke gathered about us. He said, "And what was that week's assignment about?"

"Bodyguard."

"Anything special?"

"Nope. He asked me to stick with him for that week, and to carry a gun."

"Anything happen?"

"Nothing, except a big round of parties, a lot of drinking, and a lot of night clubs."

"Just you and him?"

"Me, him, and a client, a guy from Texas, Jack Schiff. Also, a constant variety of dames."

"Was it a twenty-four hour deal?"

"What?"

"The bodyguard."

"Nope. I'd pick him up at the office at whatever hour he specified and I'd stay with him until he turned in for the night. I figured he expected trouble to flare suddenly."

"You mean between him and this Jack Schiff?"

"That was my figure. That's the only guy who was with us all the time. I was supposed to be one of Keith's office associates. He and this Schiff did a lot of talking, out of earshot, but I was always near enough in case of trouble."

"And do you know what they were talking about?"

"Business. Schiff's one-year contract had run out, and Keith wanted to sign him for another year. He wined him, and dined him, but I had a hunch he was a little afraid of him too."

"How'd it turn out?"

"They signed a new contract, and they parted — as far as I'm concerned — the best of friends."

Parker smoked in silence. Then he said, "Figure there's any connection?"

"Between what?"

"Between requests for a bodyguard. First time he used you, it was some kind of business thing between him and this Schiff. This lasted a week. Figures Schiff came up from Texas. Figures he stayed a week."

"That's right. He stayed a week."

"Now he wanted you for a bodyguard again. Short haul, this trip. Just for this evening. And again he's involved in a business deal. Brad Hartley. And Hartley doesn't live in Texas. Hartley lives here. Any of this make sense to you?"

"Nope."

"Me neither. I'm just doing the free-association jiggle. Maybe somewhere it'll strike a chord. Let's try putting it together this way. Maybe somewhere along the line this guy, this Keith, expects violence from his clients. He hires himself a bodyguard when he figures this violence might come to a head. Any sense to that?"

"Well," I said, "maybe with a wild man from Texas. This Schiff was big and brawny, an oil man with

millions. Guys like that sometimes like to get their names in the newspapers, so they get themselves a publicity guy. Maybe with a guy like that, violence figures. But with the distinguished Brad Hartley . . ."

"It don't figure, no question about that. Now about this singer, the sister, Julia. She the type who figures to hit her brother over the head with a candlestick?"

"Everybody's the type, Lieutenant. Depends upon the provocation."

"You ain't being much help, are you, shamus?"

"Not yet I'm not."

There was a rap on the door. Parker called: "Yeah?"

Stanley stuck his head in. "Got your pigeon, Lieutenant."

"Hartley?"

"Yeah."

"Good. Want to listen, Pete?"

"And how."

We trooped back to the drawing room. Walsh was sitting on a couch and Stanley joined him. Standing in the center of the room, panama hat in hand, was a tall man with a florid face, upscaled eyebrows, and black eyes as bright as a terrier's. He wore a dark-blue, single-breasted, lightweight suit with perfect shoulders, a button-down, faintly yellow shirt, and a dark-blue tie with small maroon figures. The panama hat was in his left hand. In his right were pale yellow chamois-type gloves and a shiny black walking stick. He leaned gracefully on the stick, a tall slender man of about fifty, but young-looking, sprightly and vital.

Parker said, "Mr. Hartley? I'm Lieutenant Parker."

"How do you do?" His voice was deep, with a cultured enunciation. "Your man informed me of the circumstances. Terrible, fantastic. But if there is anything I can do, anything whatever, of course . . ."

"Won't you come in here, sir, please?" Parker took him to the study and I followed. Parker said, "Peter Chambers, a private detective."

"How do you do?" He laid away his cane and gloves and we shook hands. His hand was hard, strong and dry. He put his hat on his gloves and sat down. He said, "Absolutely fantastic. We only left here at ten o'clock. Your man tells me the . . . the thing was discovered at eleven."

"That's right, sir. Which means, definitely, the murder occurred between ten and eleven. That's good for us, sir. It limits it."

"Yes. I understand."

Parker re-lit his dead cigar. He paced, then stopped in front of Hartley. "In a murder investigation, Mr. Hartley, we ask a lot of questions. We get a lot of answers. Then sometimes we get a pattern. Sometimes we don't. But we try."

"Of course."

"I've been informed that you had an appointment with Mr. Keith for seven-thirty. Would you please tell us about that? Start from as far back as you like."

Hartley sighed, stroked the corners of his mouth with thumb and forefinger, said, "How far back, Lieutenant Parker?"

"Let's say from the beginning of your acquaintance with Max Keith."

"All right, sir. As you may know, Hartley and Simmons consists of me, Brad Hartley. My former partner, Hiram Simmons, died ten years ago."

"I didn't know that, sir."

"Whatever, several years ago, business began falling off, and I began to bethink myself of ways and means to stimulate the same. The idea of publicity relations came to me. Advertising for an established investment house — I mean the usual garish type of advertising — is out of the question. But a subtle type of advertising — a good press, as a matter of fact, judicious placement of proper items properly but subtly brought to the public eye — this can well serve the type of business stimulation I sought. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"I endeavored to meet people in that field, and one of the people I met was Max Keith. I found him a most intelligent, very active, practical and charming young man. And fun-loving, to boot. It happens, sir, I'm a fun-loving man myself. I'm not particularly attracted to a stuffy type of individual. Be that as it may, I retained Keith Associates as my public relations firm, at twenty-five thousand dollars a year."

"When was that, Mr. Hartley?"

"Two years ago. Whether or not, Keith Associates could claim sole credit therefore — there is the possibility that things in general improved — business palpably improved. At the end of the first year, I renewed my contract."

"Same fee?" Parker said.

Hartley's eyes crinkled in a wry smile. "No, sir. Mr. Keith is — was — an astute business man. The fee was four times as much. A hundred thousand dollars. I felt it was worth it, and we came to an agreement. That contract was to have run out next week, and our meeting tonight was to discuss its renewal."

Parker looked at me, and then his eyes went back to Hartley. "Contract, huh?"

Hartley frowned. "Yes. That's right."

"Any idea why Mr. Keith would have wanted a bodyguard?"

"A what?"

"Bodyguard."

"Bodyguard for what?"

"I don't know. As I told you before, Mr. Hartley, part of a cop's job is to seek a pattern. Six months ago, Keith had a contract deal. He hired a bodyguard. Tonight, you say, your meeting with him was on a contract deal. So happens, he tried to hire himself a bodyguard for tonight too. He didn't press it, but he tried. Make any sense to you, Mr. Hartley?"

"None whatever."

"Okay. What happened?"

"My appointment was for seven-thirty. Here at his apartment."

"For dinner?"

"No. I had dinner earlier."

"With your family?"

"No. Alone."

Parker's cigar was dead again. He took it out of his mouth. "That usual?"

"My dining alone?"

"Yes."

"Usual when I'm a bachelor, which is what I am right now. My family is up in Maine."

"How much of a family, Mr. Hartley?"

"My wife. My son, who attends West Point. My daughter, who is engaged to be married to John Allen. That's Governor Allen's son, Governor Allen of Louisiana."

"I see. All right. You came here at seven-thirty, after dinner . . ."

"That's right, Lieutenant. We chatted, had a few drinks, talked business, came to a decision."

"May I inquire about this decision?"

"I decided to renew my contract."

"For how long?"

"Another year."

"Price?"

"Same price. A hundred thousand dollars."

"Then?"

"Keith took me to his projection room and showed me rather an amusing motion picture."

"What about?"

"Sun-bathers in the Swiss Alps. Gymnastics, sports, even tennis — men and women, all in various stages of undress. Quite amusing."

"How long did that last?"

"A half hour, perhaps."

"Then?"

"Then we went back to the drawing room. A Miss Rollins arrived, a member of Mr. Keith's staff . . ."

From there, his story was substantially the same as Ruth Rollins'. There was one slight variance. At about nine-thirty, there was a ring downstairs, which Keith answered, and then a ring upstairs, which Miss Rollins answered. She'd ushered in a man, who appeared slightly drunk. The man had wanted to see Keith, and Miss Rollins had taken him to Keith, but it developed in a confused sort of way, that the man was looking for another Keith, a Reginald Keith. He was most apologetic, weaved about for a few minutes, gave them all a laugh, then departed.

"All?" Parker said. "Who was here then?"

"Miss Rollins, Mr. Keith, Mr. Adams, and Mr. Keith's sister — I don't recollect her name."

Carl Walsh came through the archway.

Parker said, "Yes, Carl?"

"Excuse me. Steve's on the phone. The dame ain't home."

Parker pulled at his sleeve and looked at his watch. "Not home, eh? She live in a hotel?"

"I'll ask." Carl disappeared.

Parker said, "What did you do after you left here, Mr. Hartley?"

"It was a warm evening. I left

with Miss Rollins. I put her in a cab, and then I strolled. I returned to my apartment perhaps twenty minutes before your man came to me . . . informing me of what had occurred."

Carl returned. "She lives in an apartment house, Chief."

"Tell Steve to get to the super, flash his potsy, and get into the apartment. He's to wait for her there. When she show's he's to bring her down to Headquarters. If she doesn't show, after a while, let him call me downtown, and we'll relieve him. Somebody stays there until she does show."

"Yes sir, Chief."

"And Carl . . ."

"Yes?"

"Send in Miss Rollins."

"Yes sir, Chief."

Parker munched on his cigar. I lit a cigarette, offered one, belatedly, to Hartley. Hartley shook it off, brought out a cigarette case, and had one of his own, a special long job with a filter tip. Then Carl Walsh came through with Ruth Rollins. Parker said, "Ah, Miss Rollins . . ."

Hartley jumped to his feet, nodded.

Miss Rollins said, "How do you do, Mr. Hartley?"

Parker said, "Two questions, Miss Rollins."

"Yes, sir?"

"One. Mr. Hartley tells us he deposited you in a cab when you two left. Where did you go?"

"Home. To my apartment."

"Where's that?"

"82 East 73rd."

"And now another thing. Mr. Hartley tells us about an intrusion, some kind of drunk that wandered in here. Do you remember that?"

"Certainly."

Parker looked aggrieved. "You didn't mention it."

"No," she said. "Come to think of it, I didn't. It had absolutely no importance. It slipped my mind. I was trying to concentrate on all the events, everything that I thought could possibly help you. It . . . simply slipped my mind."

"Perfectly natural," Parker said. "But you did see him, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes. In fact, I opened the door for him. He was looking for someone else, he said. A . . . a Reginald Keith, I believe."

"That's right," Hartley said. "Reginald Keith."

Parker turned his back and walked, slowly. Then he came back, slowly. "Probably junk, the kind of junk that clutters up a file. But you punch every key that pops up, that's being a cop. Okay, you're both here. Between you, we ought to be able to get a picture. Let's have a description of this drunk."

One prompted the other and the picture came up like this: tall, broad-shouldered, red hair, ruddy face, smooth reddish eyebrows, quite handsome, about thirty-five, and two scars. Two small scars. One at each eyebrow. Each smooth reddish eyebrow, split by a small scar.

Parker and I looked at each other.

Then Parker went to the archway and called: "Walsh."

Walsh appeared. Parker said, "Take Miss Rollins and Mr. Hartley down to my car."

"Yes sir. What about you, sir?"

"I'll be right down."

Hartley said, "Your car, Lieutenant?"

Parker said, "We'll go down to Headquarters. You two'll look at pictures. I've got a broken-down hunch. Please go with Detective Walsh."

Walsh got them out of there, and Parker said, "Huk in town?"

"I don't know."

"How's he figure in this?"

"Search me."

I followed him into the living room. He said, "Certainly sounds like Huk, doesn't it?"

"Sounds, all right."

The telephone rang. Parker lifted the receiver and listened after saying, "Parker," once. Then he said, "Good. Don't talk to him, and let him save his talking for us. Take him to Headquarters. We'll be there." He hung up.

I said, "Who's that?"

"Fleetwood picked up Adams." He got his hat, went to the door, and I went with him. The only one left in the apartment was the uniformed cop. In the elevator, Parker said, "You coming downtown with us?"

"I'm going to stop off at my apartment first."

"Then?"

"Then I'm coming down."

"Good." In the lobby downstairs, he took his hat off and scratched a nubby finger at his stiff short-cut hair. "You heard Hartley, didn't you?"

"Sure."

"Heard how he enjoyed a motion picture with a lot of sun-bathers in the Swiss Alps?"

"Sure."

"It's got a catch."

"What size?"

"Large size."

"How come?"

"That projector. It had no film in it. No film at all in the projection room. No film anywhere. Not one strip in the entire god damn apartment."

3.

The Century was an ancient and orderly mass of rock on 34th Street and 8th Avenue. It was staid, respectable and out-of-townish. The lobby had more spread than the back-side of an opera singer: vast, carpet-quiet and cushiony. There was a marble desk with two skinny night clerks, a bank of seven brass-doored elevators, and off in a corner, a covey of public telephone booths. I used one and called the hotel and got through to Mary Hoover and said, "What's the room number?"

"503."

"Thanks."

I hung up, went to one of the elevators, said, "Five," got hoisted

up, went to 503, knocked and said, "Me," to the "Who's there?"

Julia Keith opened the door. I went in.

It was nice. Suite stuff. Big living room, last furnished thirty years ago, but clean and smelling of hotel dust. Figured for a bedroom and bath, maybe even a kitchenette. Figured for at least twenty dollars a day. Nothing small about Julia Keith. Figuratively, and literally. Nothing small. From the eyes to the figure. Right now the figure was encased in a pink satin dressing gown pulled sash-tight in the middle. That divided her in two, upper and lower, and it was a frantic question as to which section grabbed your eyes first. All pink-smooth and shiny and there was no rustle of anything on underneath as she paced puffing hard on a cigarette. This was no time for admiration, but I admired. The upper section and the lower section, and the tremulous movements beneath the pink satin dressing gown as she walked, striding long, the pink gown parting occasionally for a view of a long brown tapered leg.

Julia Keith. Black hair, black eyes, high-boned face, and red wet trembling lips. She squashed the cigarette in a tray, whirled about, said, "What happened?" She had the kind of voice that made for the tearing off of pink satin dressing gowns, the violent tearing off of same: deep, throaty, vibrant, restrained. Even now, it was that kind of voice.

"He was killed."

"How?"

"He was hit over the head with a candlestick. A smooth gold candlestick. With your fingerprints all over it, and only yours."

The enormous black eyes grew more enormous, magnified by unshed tears. "He had it coming. He had it coming for a long time."

"But did he have it coming from you?"

"What's the matter with you?"

"Me? Nothing's the matter with me. Only I'm talking like cops are thinking. He was killed between ten and eleven. Hit over the head with a candlestick. Only your fingerprints are on the candlestick. Plus there are witnesses to the fact that you threatened him. Plus you share in half of his estate, by his will. And now you say he had it coming. Real cosy. Go play with a jury on a deal like that."

She went to a table, lit a new cigarette, started walking again, walking hard. "Ten and eleven," she said. "I can say I was with you, can't I? You and me, alone. That's an alibi, isn't it? An alibi."

"Sure. But who'll buy it?" I started to sing: "Who'll buy my alibi . . . ?"

"Stop that."

"Who'll buy it? A jury? No. The cheapest commodity in the world is the testimony of a private detective. There are guys who are in business practically for the one purpose of supplying alibis. A jury is always cautioned about that. Believe me,

Julia, the testimony of a private detective stinks, especially when it's uncorroborated, and who's going to corroborate this testimony?"

She sucked on the cigarette.

I said, "Easy does it. You said he had it coming. Why?"

"Because he was a louse. My brother. A gilt-edged, double-barreled, fourteen carat louse."

"Hated him, didn't you?"

"No. There are all kinds of lice. This was a charming one. He was hard to hate. Most of the time, I liked him. He could get under your skin. He could be kind, when he wanted to, sweet, considerate. You couldn't help liking him — until he'd go obstreperous."

"Did you like him lately, or hate him?"

"Liked him. Which was the reason for the candlestick. He had admired it one time as we walked along Madison Avenue. He had a birthday coming up this week. Which is why I bought that candlestick."

"Keep talking."

"I brought it to him, this evening, early this evening. But he had those people there, and he hardly even looked at it."

"And the argument? What was that about?"

"He went lousy on me again. Took me into the other room, and threw me a proposition. He wanted me to stay with a guy."

"He — *what?*"

"You heard me. Prospective client. Guy he had lined up as a client. Guy who was sweet on me. Look, I'm no angel. God knows, and you know, I'm no angel. But I sleep with whom I choose to sleep. I don't sleep around because it'll help my brother in business. I'd see him fry in hell first, where he's frying right now."

"Real sisterly."

"Maybe I'm hysterical. Maybe I don't mean it. Maybe I just can't realize he's dead. Maybe even you'll get to hate me, knowing the kind of crazy bastard I am. But that's the way I am. Hate me, if you want to."

I went to her. I took the cigarette out of her hand. I put my mouth on her mouth and her body pressed to me and I could feel the heaving of her stomach against mine. Then I said, "Easy does it, Julia. Stay put. Stay right here. Papa's going to work. Papa'll be in touch. And one more thing."

"Yes?"

"Papa doesn't hate you."

4.

Parker's office was more barren than an established playwright commissioned to do a TV show on order. A young cop ushered me in and said, "He's expecting you. Wait." The office had two windows, four walls, one desk, one swivel-chair, five straight-back chairs, one telephone, two ashtrays, one inter-com, one door, one floor, and one ceiling. Now it had me, sitting and smoking.

The door opened and Parker came in accompanied by a tall blond catwalk guy with narrow blue eyes, a pointy nose and a lawn-mower haircut. "Ralph Adams," Parker said. "Peter Chambers."

We shook hands. He was one of those hearty guys. He had a fist like a vise. When my knuckles expanded back into place, I said: "I think we met once. First time I worked for Keith."

"Yeah," Adams said. "That's right."

Parker said, "Okay, Mr. Adams. Thanks for the cooperation. Where'll we be able to find you?"

"At the office. Or at home."

"Fine. You're through here. Thanks again."

"Bye, then. Bye, Mr. Chambers."

He went away, and Parker said, "That little sister, we haven't been able to lay our hands on her yet. Any ideas?"

"No."

He went behind the desk, slumped in the swivel chair, opened the desk drawer, brought out a photograph and a packet of keys. He handed me the photograph. "Tommy Huk," he said. "No question. Identified by all parties. Rollins, Hartley and Adams. Now about that little sister —"

"Where are the other two?"

"Which other two?"

"Rollins and Hartley?"

"Took their statements and sent them home. Now about that little sister —"

"And what's with keys?"

"Yeah, keys." He took up the packet and nodded over it as though he were saying a prayer. "Max Keith's keys. We've got them all pegged — except two."

I traded the picture for the packet of keys. It contained eight keys, some long, some short. I said, "Which are the two you have no line on?"

He reached across the desk and showed me. Two keys. The usual small jobs, of the Segal or Yale type. I said, "I'd like to help, Lieutenant."

"About that little sister, that Julia —"

"I'd like to help."

"Why?"

"I feel I'm mixed up in this. Maybe if I'd accepted that bodyguard thing, the guy'd be alive. You get crazy conscience pangs like that. Okay if I join, Lieutenant?"

"I couldn't keep you out if I wanted to."

"Lieutenant . . ." I used my best little-boy voice. "You? The very symbol of authority?"

"Stick it," he said. "I know you, shamus. When you're in, you're in. Okay, it's official. You're in. What do you want?"

"Duplicates of those two keys."

"I've made twenty sets of duplicates. Handed most of them around to my guys."

"Any left?"

He looked at me, a long look. Then he said, "I play." He opened the desk drawer again and donated two keys. "If you help, kid, you get

no credit. This is Department business. You're in, only because you're a friend."

"Thanks."

"Now about the little sister —"

"What about Huk?"

"He's in town."

"You got him located?"

"Not yet. Now about the little sister —"

I went for the door, talking as I went. "I'll let you know, Lieutenant. Anything breaks, I'll let you know . . ."

Downstairs I flagged a cab and I went to where I didn't think cops had gone, The Purple Room, on First Avenue, a late spot that started jumping at midnight and jumped as late as the law would allow. The entertainment was a harp, a fiddle and a piano — each giving with the soft stuff in rotation — but the stuff was no softer than the lights which were dimmer than the viewpoint of a pregnant spinster. The food was first rate, the decor lavish, the potables superb, and the clientele consisted of show folk, gay folk and nighttime dilettantes. It was managed by Henri Clouet, a gentleman of impeccable taste, and impeccable discretion. It was owned by Tommy Huk, screened by Henri Clouet — Clouet was the man to whom the license had been issued.

Tommy Huk. Hoodlum, allegedly reformed. One of the few small-bore men in the business. Tommy Huk, soft-spoken and dangerous, once a killer for a West Coast labor union, then moving up to more important positions, and then retiring when the union heads were jailed for racket activities. Now Tommy Huk was the money behind Vero's in Hollywood, the Plump Room in Chicago, and the Purple Room in New York — and Tommy Huk was fairly respectable. Headquarters was Hollywood, and he rarely stirred from there, except for flying junkets to Chicago and New York. He had done time once, three years in Sing Sing — but this was a coarse stick-up job, in his youth, before he had begun to realize on his capabilities.

The Purple Room was crowded tight, the bar nudgingly thronged, and I had to fight through to buy myself a drink. Then I found Henri Clouet and he led me to his private table.

"Long time," he said, "no see."

"Very witty," I said. "Real sharp."

He grinned with spaced teeth. "Always with the joke, this Chambers."

"I've got another joke."

"Dirty, I hope." The grin remained.

"Yeah, dirty. A two word joke. Tommy Huk."

No more grin. "Something is wrong?"

"Guess."

"I have guessed."

"How?"

"You see over there?" His eyes pointed.

I looked. I saw two bald-headed beefy men living it up. They had a

bottle on the table, and the waiter was pouring for them. They were laughing and happy and narrow-eyed in appreciation of every bulging curve of the colored lady who played the harp in a dress that held itself up by magic.

"I see," I said, "over there."

"Cattle from Homicide."

"What?"

"Cattle — how you say it?"

"Bulls?"

The grin returned. "But of course. Bulls from Homicide."

So I had *not* gone where the police hadn't thought of going. Dear old Parker. I'd held out the Purple Room on him, and he had held it out on me.

Henri said, "It is for Tommy?"

"It is for Tommy," I said. "Where is he?"

Henri shrugged Gallic shoulders. "I have not the faintest of ideas."

"Well," I said, getting up, "if an idea does come along smack-bang out of nowhere, tell him Peter Chambers has been looking for him."

"For what?"

"For getting him out of a hole, maybe. Tell him cops are looking for him, and I know why cops are looking for him. Tell him if he wants to crawl out of the hole, maybe I can show him how. Tell him all of that, Henri, just in case a wandering idea comes along and bites you on your fat behind. And tell him where I live too."

I gave him the address, pinched his cheek, went out into the First Avenue air, breathed deep of city soot, waved down an empty cab speeding to nowhere, went home, set the clock sourly for early in the morning . . . and so to sleep.

5.

Morning was hot. Fifth Avenue was hot. I was hot strolling Fifth Avenue at the ungodly hour of 10 A.M. I arrived at 545 and wheeled into the lobby. Conaty was six, and I said six to the elevator boy.

"Hot," said the elevator boy.

I said, "Hot."

But the waiting room of Frank Conaty, Esquire, was air-conditioned, pine-smelling, cool and relaxing, only I stopped relaxing before I could start, because the first object that loomed into my line of vision was Detective-lieutenant Louis Parker, ample bulk evenly distributed in a hard chair, an open magazine on one crossed knee.

He didn't look up from the magazine but he said, "Hi, shamus."

Ah the eyes of the law.

I took the magazine off his knee, and sat near him. I said, "They keep Homicide waiting too?"

"Said it'll be a minute. What are you doing here?"

"Same as you I suppose. Inquiry into the will."

"Yeah."

"Know the guy, the lawyer-guy?"

"Never had the pleasure. You?"

"I introduced him to Keith."

The crossed knees uncrossed and

he sat up. "Mean anything?"

"Doesn't mean a thing. Just introduced them. Frank Conaty's an old friend."

"Right guy?"

"The rightest."

A girl came through and said, "All right, Lieutenant." I stood up with him and the girl looked at me. Parker said, "It's all right," and she led us to Frank Conaty's room, real legal-like with books. Conaty was young, spry, and orange-faced with large blue eyes that gave off no expression, blue eyes like shattered glass. He smiled at me, said, "Didn't expect you. Had a date with the Lieutenant."

I said, "We're here on the same errand."

"Fine, fine. Sit down, gentlemen, won't you?"

Nobody sat, except Conaty.

Conaty said, "Terrible thing, this Keith thing."

"Yeah," Parker said. He pulled the blue-back document from his jacket pocket and tossed it on Conaty's desk. "Keith's will. It's got your name on it as attorney. A few questions."

"Just a minute, Lieutenant." Conaty opened it, looked at it, folded it back into shape, leaned over and handed it to Parker. "No good. This will is no good."

"Why?" Parker frowned. "What's the matter with it?"

"It's not his *last* will and testament."

"Meaning . . . ?" Parker said.

"The law. A subsequent will, properly executed, revokes all prior wills. That's the law, Lieutenant. And there's a subsequent will." Conaty reached down into a drawer and brought up a twin to the blue-backed document. "Got it out after I heard about Keith."

"Can I have a look?" Parker said.

"Sure. Nothing improper about that, after the decease of the testator. This will now becomes public knowledge. Has to be probated."

"Yeah, yeah," Parker mumbled. "Nothing improper, has to be probated — let's see the damn thing."

Conaty smiled, Parker grabbed, and I looked over his shoulder. It was a tiny will. Everything Max Keith owned he left to his only living relative: Julia Keith, his sister.

Parker looked at the date, looked at the date on the other will, said, "The good one's dated one day later. This guy changed his mind in a hurry, didn't he?"

"I don't know about that," Conaty said.

Parker's hackles were up. "Lawyers," he groaned. "Tackle a lawyer, it's like shooting at a shark with spitballs."

"Not at all," Conaty said. "I'm trying to help you."

"That's help?"

"Ordinarily, I wouldn't comment on the motives, the mental gyrations, of a client. But you're here, obviously, in the investigation of a murder case. You're not here to discuss wills, per se."

"Very good," said Parker.

Conaty smiled. "All right. Now, my comment is: I don't think my client changed his mind in a hurry."

"Well, he didn't change it slow. A new will dated one day after the old one."

"No, I think he actually had a plan in mind. Please understand this. He didn't discuss it with me. He came here one day, told me to draw a will dividing his estate be- his sister and the lady Ruth Rollins. He wanted it drawn in a hurry, and it was executed and witnessed immediately. He took that will away with him. Next day he was here, grinning all the time. He asked about the law, whether a later dated will superceded a prior will, despite the fact that the prior will remained undestroyed. I assured him that was the fact. Then he ordered this new will. And this one he left with me, for safekeeping with me."

"I see," said Parker. "Excuse the cracks before, Counsellor."

"Oh, I've a thick hide, Lieutenant."

"One more question, Mr. Conaty. Do you think the sister, this Julia, knew about this new will?"

"I have no idea, sir. I don't know who knew about any of these wills, as a matter of fact."

"I see. All right, thank you very much, Counsellor."

"Not at all." He smiled in my direction. "Mr. Chambers has been strangely quiet, which is rather unusual for Mr. Chambers."

"The Lieutenant has been making with some real good talk." I said. "I couldn't have improved on it."

The Lieutenant made with more talk outside in the sunshine of Fifth Avenue. "Now about that little sister . . ." he said.

"Gets it all now, under the new will, doesn't she?"

"Yeah, and you're the one that knows more about her than any of us. She ain't been back to that apartment of hers. I've got a small hunch she's blown."

"Blown?"

"The coop."

"How goes it with Ruth Rollins?"

"We were talking about Julia . . ."

"Let's be logical, Lieutenant. We've got two wills, and one of them is useless. Yet the one that is useless is the one that's around to be seen."

"So?"

"Who benefits from that one? I mean, the sister gets all from the new will — which, maybe nobody knows about. And she gets half from the phony, the one people might know about. But who gets the other half, Lieutenant? Who gets the other half?"

Grudgingly he said, "I see what you mean."

"So how's with Ruth Rollins?"

"Smooth. No wrinkles."

"And Brad Hartley?"

"Just as smooth."

"And this Adams?"

"All too smooth, all of it, too

smooth to suit me. Everybody's nice and innocent-talking. Haven't talked to the little sister yet, that Julia —"

"And Tommy Huk?"

"I got my lines out on that."

I stopped and I stared at him like a pitcher at a catcher waiting for a change of signal. I said, "Pick a color."

"What's with you?"

"I'll pick a color."

Testily: "Okay. Pick."

"I pick purple."

Comprehension spread over his face. "Why you shrewd little stealing son of a —"

"Lieutenant, we should have more confidence in each other. Purple Room. I didn't think you guys knew. Bad judgment on my part."

He squinted, smiling. "And bad judgment on mine."

"I've got a line out too. Who's got better bait, Lieutenant?"

"I wouldn't know. Now about that little sister —"

"Bye, now, Lieutenant. And watch those expense accounts. Your boys were drinking up all of the purple atmosphere of the Purple Room, and atmosphere wasn't all they were drinking up."

6.

Rockefeller Plaza. Wondrous New York. There it is, symbol of shining New York. Rise of stone like square-cut mountains. Gleaming windows like a thousand eyes. Narrow canyons in a wilderness of concrete. Stone, steel, statuary — blueprint of the business age — high pile of man-made hardness, jagged silhouette against a gentle sky. And the people bustling about, the thousands of them, the thousands of offices, each harboring a conspiracy of its own — no love, now; no relaxation; no art, no poetry, no tenderness; no wife and children; no mistress; no lying about for a snooze; no green trees, no countryside, no lilac-scented air — the bustling thousands, scurrying like ants beneath a lifted rock — the bustling thousands, intent upon one purpose: the making of a buck; their energies directed to the transference of the buck: your buck to them, their buck to another.

I pushed open the door of *Keith Associates* and the receptionist behind the large modern blue-steel desk looked up encouragingly.

"Miss Rollins," I said.

"She's not in."

"Expected?"

"Sorry, but she won't be in today. She's not feeling very well. We've had a —"

"Yes, I know. Mr. Adams?"

"He's here. Who shall I say?"

"Peter Chambers."

"Thank you." She lifted a phone, whispered into it, hung up, said, "Won't you sit down?"

I started for a chair, but Ralph Adams came through a leather swinging door, and approached me with hand outstretched. He said,

"Hi." We shook hands, and he said, "Look. Let's go get out of here. I'm dying for a drink. Let's go downstairs."

"Sure."

The elevator took us down into the bowels of the building where Ye Old Dutch Tavern was quiet and cool. Adams ordered a whiskey sour, and so did I. He finished his quickly, ordered another, sipped, sat back, smiled, said, "All right. Where do we go from here?"

"You," I said, "might go to jail. Or worse."

"For what?"

"For the murder of Max Keith."

He straightened up. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"Look, Ralph. I'm nobody, I'm nothing official, I'm a guy hustling around the fringe. So I can talk."

"Well, talk."

"Question first."

"Shoot."

"Did you kill Max Keith?"

He pulled on the whiskey sour. "You nuts?"

Mildly I said, "I'm all right."

"Then why the crazy question?"

"Because you're a suspect, boy, whether you like it or not."

"Why? How come?"

"Ruth Rollins."

He tightened his upper lip against his teeth. "What's she got to do with me?"

"She put you right in the middle, that's what she's got to do with you. As I intimated a moment ago, I'm not cops. I don't have to be discreet, hold out on you." I was getting a reaction. The color was coming up in his face, and he was rubbing a hand nervously over his bristle-cut hair. So I laid it on thicker than make-up on a new chorus girl. "She said you two had a big bust-up, that you threatened him, that there was real bad blood between you."

"Why, the miserable two-bit chiseler. And me holding out information to cover for her."

"Information? Like what?"

He was talking fast. "Like that she knew that guy we pointed out from the rogue's gallery pictures. What's his name?"

"Huk?"

"Yeah. I thought it was a nickname."

"How do you know she knew him?"

"Call came in once, from the Coast. The wires got tangled, and when I lifted my phone, I heard them talking. Huk. That was his name. I thought it was a nickname."

"What were they talking about?"

"Nothing, except the guy sounded sweet on her."

"Why'd you hold this out on the cops?"

He finished his drink. He was talking more slowly. "I'd rather not answer that."

"Okay. Now, she came to work here five months ago. You know who recommended her?"

"Yeah. A client from Hollywood. Sam Murray. One of the big ones.

One of the nine big ones."

"Now, about these clients, these big ones . . ."

"A hundred thousand bucks each. Nine big ones at a hundred thousand a throw. That's a nice foundation for a business, isn't it?"

"Yeah," I said. "It is. Was a guy like Max Keith worth it?"

"Frankly, no. Max was a good press agent, period. He could get your name in the papers, he was well-connected, he could get you a nice press, but a hundred thousand bucks a crack . . . bro*ther* . . ."

"Then why'd they pay it?"

He shifted his shoulders. "Charm, I suppose. A good talker. Search me. He certainly had a gift of gab."

I motioned to the waiter and ordered again, for both of us. Then I said, "Let's get back to Ruthie. She came here five months ago, recommended by Sam Murray."

"Yeah, and Max hired her. Max, who said he'd never hire a female in an important spot."

"And two months later, they were engaged."

"That stinks too, pal. Because at that time, I happen to know he had a little girl friend he was nuts about. When the engagement was announced that kid blew, went to Europe. A class kid, society stuff."

"Then how come he became engaged to Ruth Rollins?"

The waiter brought our drinks and Ralph promptly went to work on his. He lowered the glass, said, "Between you and me, I think she had something on him."

"Like what?"

"I don't know."

"Do you know he made a will a month later, leaving half his estate to her?"

"No. But I'm not surprised. That dame had something on him. I'd bet on that."

I paid the check, and we headed for the elevators. "Anything else?" I said.

"Nothing. But if that dame was putting the pressure to him, then old Max was marking time, playing the nice engaged swain, but all the time, I'll bet you — he was waiting to put the axe to *her*."

7.

I called Mary Hoover and went to visit Julia Keith. She answered my knock all dressed up, strutting about with more sparkle than expensive dentures. She wore a cream-colored gabardine suit, spike-heeled black pumps and a black lacy blouse all the way up to the neck.

I said, "You haven't been out, have you?"

"You bet I have."

"You're begging for trouble, my out-spoken one."

"Okay, so I'm begging. But I can't stay cooped up in here. It . . . it runs against my nature." She came to me, very close, and she smiled. "But I tried to be most inconspicuous. I really tried."

"You. Inconspicuous. It's an anomaly."

"What's . . . anomaly?"

"Look it up sometime. You'll get educated."

"I'm an actress. I use other people's words. Let *them* look it up." She put her arms under my arms and pulled me to her, her hands on my back. "It's good to see somebody, good to talk to somebody. Oooo . . . it's good."

Fifteen minutes later, I said, "Listen to me, will you?"

"Sure."

"I've got to get out of here."

"Sure."

"What do you think of Ruth Rollins?"

"A pig."

"What did your brother think of her?"

"Thought enough of her to get engaged."

"Think he loved her?"

"Nope."

"Why?"

"Too busy loving himself. Look, don't ask me about other people's love affairs. I've got enough trouble trying to understand my own."

"Okay. How about keys?"

"What? What's with you today? The heat got you?"

"Listen, little Miss Muff, and listen hard. I'm working. I've got a thing on my mind. A dead guy. Your brother. I haven't even been to the office yet. I've been working, and for free. Now give me a little cooperation."

"What do you think I've been giving you?"

I produced the two keys. "These are off your brother's key packet. Duplicates. All his keys are explained, except these two. Now think. Put that gorgeous head to work —"

"Again?"

"Will you please be serious?"

She looked at the keys, fingered them, gave them back to me. She said, "I haven't the faintest idea."

"His apartment is covered, his office is covered, every other little keyhole is covered — but these. They figure for an apartment, that's the type . . ."

She concentrated, closing her black eyes, biting the red lower lip.

"Anything," I said. "Whatever comes to you . . ."

Her eyes were still closed when she said, "Oh, a long time back, I didn't understand it, maybe there's some kind of crazy connection . . ."

"Yes, honey. Yes, a long time back. How long?"

"About six-seven years ago."

"Yes, yes . . ."

"He was away, on one of his vacations. I wasn't working. I'd taken over in the office. He'd given me a power of attorney, and I was paying the bills. A funny one came in. It was a sort of rent bill. But it was funny because it was for a ten year period, ten years in advance for an apartment. Not expensive either, I mean, the monthly rate. But it was for a ten year period."

"For Max? For the Park Avenue place?"

"No. It wasn't for Max, and it wasn't for the Park Avenue place." Her eyes opened, black, and blazing, and aware. "I remember now. It was made out to Alvin Kruger, % Max Keith, and it was for an apartment at 150 Riverside Drive. That's it."

"Did you pay it, a bill for the apartment of a stranger, care of your brother, for ten years in advance? Don't tell me you paid it, power of attorney or no power of attorney."

"I showed it to Ralph Adams, and he said of course not, to hold it for Max. When Max got back, we gave it to him."

"He say anything?"

"Said nothing. Just looked at both of us, sniffed, and put the thing into his pocket. That's it, Pete. I'm probably all wet, but that's the best I can think of in the line of apartments."

"I'll check it, I'll tell you that."

"Think I helped?"

"I doubt it, but let me out of here now. And please remember. No more inconspicuous strolls. Stay put, will you?"

"I wish you'd stay put with me."

"Can't. Got work."

I turned, turned back, and then I said, "Stick with it, sister. Back at your place, it's all cops and no fun. Stay put. Be Mary Hoover. As soon as it breaks, I'll be in touch."

8.

82 East 73rd was flat, narrow, white and high. And up at the highest was the apartment of Miss Ruth Rollins. The elevator man said, "Yes, sir, she figure to be in, ain't gone out; it's the penthouse deal, to your right, number is 22A."

The finger on the buzzer brought no response for a long time, but I kept it there, and then it brought response, and response opened my mouth like a dentist had a drill in it — and kept it open for at least thirty seconds. Response was Ruth Rollins undressed in white high-heeled toeless beach shoes, the tiniest of tight white panties, and a band about her bosom that might have been wide enough to bandage someone's finger, provided the finger was a pinky and the someone was a midget. So much for apparel. In toto. The rest was smooth, hairless, long-legged, curvy, bosomy, hippy — but all in proportion — a tall cream-skinned blonde, practically naked, but her eyes haughty nonetheless.

My mouth closed.

I said, "May I come in?"

"What for?" It wasn't exactly a red-carpet reception.

"Chatter," I said. "About our friend, the deceased."

She opened the door wider and I stepped into a small foyer and then into a spacious living room with a gold rug, turquoise hangings, and rose effects. "Nice," I said.

"I was out on the terrace, taking the sun."

"So I assume." I pulled in my eyes to prevent ogling but I knew I was ogling regardless. I was beginning to see what Max Keith had seen in Ruth Rollins (and the other guy, Huk); I was practically seeing all of it; and I approved — if by approval is meant a dry mouth, a shaking hand, a prickly spine, and magnetized eyes.

Sharply she said, "What is it, please?"

"Two questions, Miss Rollins."

"And who are you — to be asking questions?"

"Good enough. Let's put it this way. You answer two questions, and I hand over a hunk of information. Like that it's a trade. Deal?"

She turned, and walked away. Rear view, it was worse. She had a way of walking. Then she came back. When my eyes moved up, *her* eyes were on mine. She said, "Don't look at me like that." But the way she said it, it was an invitation. Intricate dame, this Ruth Rollins.

"Deal?" I said.

"Let's split it. You ask your first question. Then you give your information. Then you ask your second question."

"Okay. Question. It's really a series of questions, but they're connected. You told Lieutenant Parker that one of Mr. Keith's friends recommended you for the job here in Keith's office. Who was this friend, what was his relationship to Keith, and how well did you know this friend?"

She sighed, and bent to a table for a cigarette. My hands shook as I lit it for her, and my eyes were not on the cigarette. She blew smoke in my face. "Sam Murray, one of the big producers in Hollywood. Comes East often." Cuttingly: "A married man with four kids. Have you ever met Sam?"

"I've seen him around. And don't give me that married-man-with-four-kids stuff. Every time I lamped friend Sam, he was weighed down by at least two dolls, and lookers, always."

"Sam Murray recommended me to Max. Sam and I were good friends when I was at the Coast. Sam was a client of Max's, one of the big nine. That answers your series of questions. Good enough?"

"Details?"

"No details. I answered your questions. Now what have you got to tell me?"

"The will Max Keith made, the one wherein you share in half the estate — that will stinks — it's a phony. One day later, he made a new will, cutting you out entirely."

The rose-bud mouth got smaller, and the face blanched. "That's a lie."

"I've got no reason to lie to you, lady. I've got a vague hunch that that first will was made for one purpose — to impress you. Maxie was a shrewdie, and for some reason Maxie was giving you the business.

And any of your doubts can quickly be resolved by a call to the lawyer, Frank Conaty, New York phone book, Manhattan, I mean."

She kept heaving as I talked. Heaving did not detract from her sex appeal. I stopped talking and I star-gazed, but she was the star in this proceeding. You could see her trying to pull herself together, the petulant blue eyes full of fury now. Suddenly, she pulled a switch. Her right hand swung out and she slapped the left side of my face. Gongs began to go in my head.

"Now what the hell," I said, "What the hell, lady . . . ?"

She did it again, and my shoulders began to chafe. The lady was more anxious for a thumping than the back end of a stuck ketchup bottle. I restrained myself. I said, "That's not nice."

"I don't like the way you're looking at me."

"Can it, sister. You love it."

"Don't look at me like that."

"Don't dress like that."

She slapped me again. Ambidexterous. Left hand this time, to the right cheek, only this time she got reaction. Reaction was a nosegay of knuckles lightly thrown at her chin. It sat her down, sobbing. I had a feeling she liked it.

I reached down under her armpits and brought her up. She clung to me, sobbing, all of her throbbing against me. If the lady was on the make, I wasn't having any. "Second question," I said. "You identified a guy downtown. Tommy Huk. Ever hear of him before, ever see him?"

She was still close, but now she was rigid. I pushed her back, but I held on to her arms. Her mouth was working and her eyes were wild. She squirmed back close to me and her arms went around me and her body began to sway against me and her voice at my ear was saying, "You're clever, you're capable, help me, please help me . . ."

I broke it up again.

I said, "Tommy Huk?"

"Never heard of him. Never heard of him in my life."

9.

My office was hot, the mail scanty, my secretary grimly efficient as ever. There was one message.

"A Mr. Hartley called. A Mr. Brad Hartley. He left a number."

"Thank you, Miranda."

I called Hartley downtown, did the relay of four female voices, all polite, but all insisting on my name, and then Hartley said, "Hello, Mr. Chambers."

"You called me, Mr. Hartley."

"Yes. I've been trying to reach Lieutenant Parker, but he's been out most of the day. Left word, but he hasn't called back. I thought that, well, perhaps you, who are more familiar than I with police procedure . . ."

"What is it, Mr. Hartley?"

"Two things, really. I received a phone call from Maine. My wife's

somewhat under the weather, and I was planning to go up there this evening. But the Lieutenant has requested that I remain — available. I've tried to reach him —"

"Cops have got to sleep too, Mr. Hartley."

"Of course. And then another thing occurred to me, a sort of recollection that might be of some use, perhaps. About Ralph Adams —"

"Just a minute, sir." I looked at my watch. "What time do you get through down there?"

"Oh, about three."

"I've got an errand to run right now, but as long as Parker isn't around, maybe I'm the one to talk to. Why don't you drop up to my place when you're through, my apartment I mean. It's on Central Park South — I'm in the phone book. Maybe in the meantime, I'll have reached Parker, and I'll get the two of you together. Is that all right, sir?"

"Surely. But this thing about Ralph Adams. What I remember is that Max Keith told me that Mr. Adams was no longer in his employ, that he'd given him his notice —"

"I see. Perhaps Adams told this to Parker, perhaps he didn't. It is a good piece of information. Okay. We'll go into it later. See you a little after three, then . . ."

"All right. Good bye, Mr. Chambers."

I hung up, then lifted the receiver, dialed Headquarters, asked for Captain Weaver, and learned that Parker was due at two o'clock, which was close enough. Then I buzzed Miranda for my shoulder holster. I strapped it on, examined a pistol, and fixed it in the leather pocket.

Miranda said, "I don't like it when you wear that."

"Unfortunately, I'm in a business that requires it."

"Well, don't get too brave."

"I'll try not to, Miranda."

"Where you going, just in case?"

"150 Riverside Drive. Alvin Kruger."

"Who's he?"

"Haven't the faintest."

But his name was on the bell in the small lobby of 150 Riverside Drive. It was an old house, and a sprawling one, ten stories high, and it must have been broken up into small apartments, because there were about two hundred names against two hundred push-bells on the worn wall of the small lobby. *A. Kruger* was printed in ink, and faded. I pushed, waited for a tick, kept pushing, but got no tick. I tried one of the two keys Parker had given me, and the first one worked. It opened the door into an inner lobby with a much-used dirty brown rug, old damp walls, a long mirror that needed silvering, and three small self-service elevators. *A. Kruger* had been 9G, so I tapped 9 in one of the elevators, and had a joggling but uninterrupted ride.

Upstairs, it took time to find *9G*. There were many doors and a labyrinth of corridors. Finally, I dis-

covered G. There was no name in the small metal bracket but there was a cracked mother-of-pearl push-button which I pushed. The hollow rasp inside came back at me like a Bronx cheer. I kept pegging at the button but Mr. Kruger didn't answer. I stopped pegging at the button. I unhooked the pistol kept it in my right hand, and used the second key with my left. That worked too.

It was hot inside, airless and hot, in a square box of a tiny vestibule. "Hello?" I called. "Hello, anybody?"

Nobody answered. I locked the door and moved forward, gun first. The vestibule opened into one large room, windows tightly locked. The room contained a green couch, two rose-red easy chairs, an oak desk and an oak desk-chair. There was no carpet on the wooden floor, and no pictures on the walls. There was no telephone. There was a large glass ashtray on the desk which held the stubs of ancient discolored cigarettes. There were three doors. I opened each of them. The first was a toilet, and the medicine chest was empty of anything but dust. The second was a small kitchen, but nobody had done any cooking there: the refrigerator was turned off, and the bins were empty. There was one window here, and this window had bars across it — inner bars, like a swinging gate, hinged on the left, and padlocked on the right. There was a key on top of the refrigerator which, quick-try, fit the padlock. That held me for a moment, but only a moment. A look out of the window showed me a fire escape. Thus, no one could get in by the fire-escape, but in case of fire, you could get out. Mr. Kruger was a careful guy — if there was a Mr. Kruger, which, somehow, I was beginning to doubt.

I went back to the entrance door and looked at the lock. It was a fine hunk of work, a deadlock.

Then I went to the third door. This was a closet, but there were no clothes in it. There was an object on the floor of the closet, however, a steel chest almost the size of a small trunk: a steel fire-proof chest.

I shoved the gun back into the holster, went to the desk and opened drawers. There was a wide drawer in the middle and four drawers on each side. All I got out of that were two empty envelopes addressed to Max Keith at his office and dated a couple of years ago.

That was it, and I was beginning to sweat.

I went back to the closet and pulled out the steel chest. It wasn't locked and I lifted the lid. Inside was a small flat suitcase, also of metal, the type that repair men sometimes carry, men working with electricity or television tubes or wire installations. It had a clasp-lock which I unclasped, pushing up the top. Seventeen round metal cans came into view. I took one out, unscrewed the top, and shook out the

contents, which was a roll of sixteen millimeter film. I put it back into the can, screwed the top back, placed the can back into the suitcase, pulled down the cover and clasped it. I swung the suitcase onto the couch, shoved the steel chest back into the closet, closed the closet door, and the toilet door, and the kitchen door. Then I sat down beside the suitcase and drummed fingertips on it.

This was not A. Kruger's joint. This was probably a hide-out for dear old Max who had paid for it ten years in advance. Dear old Max didn't need a hide-out, not for dalliance; for dalliance he had a lush Park Avenue apartment and he had nobody to whom to answer. So he kept this joint not as a hide-out but as a hide-in — to store things. He was only faintly connected with it — it belonged to Alvin Kruger, % Max Keith, one rent bill paid every ten years. But why? Because there are things people do not want to be connected with, things they don't want to keep in their own apartments, or their own offices. Bank vault? Even bank vaults can sometimes be examined without your consent — by virtue of a court order properly obtained. But the only thing he was hiding here was a suitcase full of film, seventeen different small cans of sixteen millimeter. It ought to make interesting looking at, and I knew just the guy who could show me.

I wiped a handkerchief across my face, took up the suitcase, and started for the door.

So the bell rang.

It wasn't the rasp I had heard. It was a softer sound. It came again — the downstairs buzzer. I looked for the reply-button, found it, and pushed. Then I set the suitcase behind the door, set myself beside that, took out the trusty roscoe, remembered Miranda's admonishment about bravery, sighed, and waited.

Two minutes later, there was a shuffling outside, and the Bronx cheer sounded in the room. I pulled the door open, but stayed behind it.

Ralph Adams had come visiting.

I moved up behind him and gave him the muzzle to the ribs, but joltingly.

Ralph Adams wasn't having any.

Ralph Adams had seen too many TV shows.

Ralph Adams wanted to be a hero, and, hero or not, I simply wasn't going to shoot him, not unless I had to. He whirled, full of fight, but he caught the side of the pistol high on the cheekbone, with force, and now he whirled again but wound up sprawled on the floor, grotesque and unbalanced, but still full of fight.

I kicked the door shut with my heel, pointed the gun, and said, "Sit there."

He seemed to debate that, but his better judgment won out, and he sat.

I said, "Smart."

"Why?"

"Because if you would have tried to get up, you'd have caught up with a couple of little holes. Holes ain't healthy."

He seemed to be debating again. He said, "You wouldn't have dared."

"I'd dare, pal, believe me. Try getting up, and you'll see what I mean. I'm here with official backing. You? You're a trespasser. When a trespasser catches holes, he's got very little come-back. Wanna talk?"

"Depends."

"On what?"

"On how official you are."

"For you, I'm still unofficial. Give you another little hint. I know, definitely, that Max Keith fired you. Cops don't know that. Yet. Last call. Wanna talk? And it's the last time I'm asking."

"What do you want to know?" He arranged himself on the floor. He crossed his legs under him and rocked. He looked like a blond Arab.

"Why'd you get fired?"

"Because that Max was a little nuts. Remember Jack Schiff?"

"Yeah?"

"He was passing through town the other day. He dropped into the office. Max was up in Connecticut. I took Schiff out to dinner, like I'd do for any client. When Max learned about this, he blew his top. He fired me."

"Why?"

"Because he was nuts. Nobody could touch the Big Nine — but he."

"I don't quite understand."

"They were his special pets. Standing orders. Only he handled these guys. I could understand that — business-wise. But when a guy blows in, and Max is out, well . . ."

"Strict, wasn't he?"

"Only about those nine bastards. He'd worked them up to a point where he didn't want anybody spoiling them. I wouldn't spoil anything for Max, and he should have known that."

"What does it mean — worked them up?"

"They all started at the usual fee — usual for big boys — maybe fifteen-twenty thousand for a year's contract. But he worked them up to a hundred thousand each, one hundred grand. It kept his knees knocking worrying that nobody shakes them up, nobody spoils the setup. Make sense?"

"A little. And a little it doesn't."

He shifted, spreading his hands behind him and leaning on them. "May as well break it all down now. That's why I held out that information on the cops."

"What information?"

"What you so cutely shook out of me this morning. That Ruth Rollins knew Huk."

"Where's the connection?"

"Max fired me. But Max is dead. There's no reason why we can't keep his business running. Rollins has brains. I figured to proposition her. That she and I set it up again, keep it rolling: Max Keith Associates —

and we'd be the associates. I figured in case she balked — I'd tell her about what I held out — and use it, sort of for pressure."

"Smart enough," I said. "Last question and then I blow. What are you doing here?"

"Same general plan. This morning I went through all Max's private papers. Anything I could learn would be to my benefit in my purpose of perpetuating his business — for me. I remembered a crazy rent bill I once saw —"

"I know all about that."

"You get around, don't you?"

"Yep."

"So that's why I'm here. Anything of Max's business that I can put together, that makes sense — it's for my benefit."

"Okay, Ralphie. Have a good time. It's all yours." I backed away, lifted the suitcase.

Ralph said, "What's that?"

"A suitcase."

"Whose?"

"Mine." I opened the door, said, "Enjoy," and slammed the door shut. I put the gun in my jacket pocket and kept my hand on it while I waited for the elevator but it was an unnecessary precaution. Ralph Adams remained inside.

Outside, I walked to the nearest drug store, checked Revere Motion Pictures in the phone book, got into the phone booth, called and asked for Harry Gleason, and when I got him I said, "Harry, there's a fast fifty for you if you get over to my apartment pronto. Got time?"

"Always got time for a fast fifty. What am I supposed to do?"

"You're supposed to bring a projector for sixteen millimeter and a portable screen, and you're supposed to do it like lightning. Are you on your way?"

"I'm practically there now."

10.

Harry Gleason was a skinny guy with a small mustache and vague myopic eyes behind thick-lensed bifocals but the sights he was showing me on a screen in my bedroom were hot enough to put fog on his glasses and sweat on his forehead. He kept saying, "Whew," and using a handkerchief on his brow and on his glasses. I did a couple of whews myself.

Pornography ran around on the screen like a peep-show on a back street in Paris. The dolls changed up and sometimes re-appeared but the male lead of each film was always one guy, and an important guy, and he was entirely unconscious of the fact that he'd grown up to be a picture actor. The setting was always the same, somehow familiar to me, but it wasn't until the second film that it came to me — Max Keith's Park Avenue apartment. There was Jack Schiff and Sam Murray . . . and I broke away once to make a phone call.

I called down to Parker and got him. I looked at my watch: it was

ten after three. I said, "Lieutenant, have a couple of your guys go up to Keith's apartment with ladders. Look the walls over. I think you're going to find small apertures, daintily masked, and behind the apertures, a large space with a sort of ledge —"

"What's the matter with you? What are you talking about? Where you calling from?"

"Send the guys, Lieutenant. I'll be in touch."

I hung up and went back to the peep show.

All the films were in duplicate. All the films, but one. That one —

Now my bell rang. I was looking forward to my company.

But the company turned out to be company I was not looking forward to. Company was Tommy Huk with a little twenty-two in his hand. For a twenty-two, you had to be a crack shot, and Tommy was a crack shot. But I didn't have the time. He didn't even get squared away. My left fist hit the gun and my right fist hit his mouth. The gun bounced and Tommy bounced. I came up with the gun and Tommy came up with a fat lip.

"Let me talk," I said. "You're in trouble. I can help. I'm insulted that you come with the peashooter."

He applied a neatly folded handkerchief to the lip. He patted, said, "You're a guy that pleads for trouble. You'll get it."

"Not me," I said. "You. That tomato tightened you into a spot. The cops are anxious for you."

"What tomato?"

"Ruth Rollins."

"That's a lie. I only talked to her this afternoon. She told me you came to call on her —"

"I don't care what she told you. *I'm* telling you. And I know from the cops."

"Know what?"

"That she fingered you down at Headquarters. That she kept her skirts clean by fingering you. That she told them that she knew you on the West Coast. That you were sweet on her. That you called her here in New York after she got here. Look, pal, I don't know what else she told them — I had to dig it out of them — but if you can straighten *me* out, I can straighten you out with the coppers."

"Dames," he said, the red coming up on his face. "All dames are the same. Why should *you* be fronting for me?"

"Because — even if the cops think you did — I *know* you didn't freeze Max Keith." Psychology was in order. I brought him his gun and gave it to him. He looked at it, shifted it from hand to hand, put it away.

"How do you know?" he said.

"Because you're not that crude. You're a clean guy, a bullet guy, not a squasher with candlesticks."

He smiled. He had a small mouth and tight lips. When he talked, not much of his mouth moved, and he kept his voice low.

I said, "Straighten me out, pal. I'll front for you. You're a big man now. You don't need cops looking for you."

"Dames," he said. "Never fails."

"Let's have it, Tommy."

"Dames. This one got to me. Class, got something. It got to me. Maybe the high-hat stuff she give me. But it didn't go. Went for a while, but then it didn't go. Sam Murray lifted her, good customer of mine, Sam, didn't hold it against him, didn't hold it against either of them. But the dame stayed with me, inside, if you know what I mean."

"Sure," I said.

"Then maybe Sam got tired of her. He sent her East here. But Sam had something on this guy, this Keith, which he told her, and which put her in a spot to put the squeeze on him. A class dame, she does a class squeeze. Gets herself engaged to the guy, gets put into his will for half, then she works on me for one little job. If I cool the guy, she sits pretty. That's why I'm in town. That's the truth." Shrug. "I can tell it, because it never came off."

"Did it come close?"

"Nope. Came to the point where she'd finger him. Last night, she went over there, figured he'd be alone, and I was going to drop by, fall in by mistake, so I can put the glom on him. But the joint was crawling with people. That's as far as it went. I was gonna back out of the deal. Too many people saw me. Otherwise, I would've pulled it, somewhere, somehow, clean, not messy. That's it, fink, and thanks for the interest. You can tell it to the cops if you like, but you didn't get it from me, you just heard it around."

The bell rang again.

He said, "I'm leaving."

I opened the door for Brad Hartley. Hartley took one look, said, "That's the man, that's him." Huk went by, out into the corridor, and away, Hartley said, "But that's the man. Aren't you going to hold him?"

"I'm going to hold you." I closed the door.

"Hold me for what?"

"The murder of Max Keith. Sit down, Mr. Hartley. Compose yourself. I'm going to do it real fast."

He stood. He didn't sit. He said, "Do what?"

"Save you a lot of grief, that's what. Save you a lot of terrible publicity, save your family from a lot of —"

He held up strong. Firmly he said, "Whatever you're going to do, please do it quickly."

"Exactly my sentiments. Max Keith, stinker de luxe. Latched on to clients that could pay, went to work on a small contract, and made that grow to a large one. By an angle."

"Angle? Angle?"

"Picked guys that liked to live. Fixed them up with gorgeous tootsies. Gave them his apartment for

private parties. Let them live it up. But he had cameras going on the proceedings. When it came to renewal time, he showed them a hot film, and the boys hustled for a pen to sign. High class blackmail. He used to worry a little about it too, when it came to renewal time. Liked to have a bodyguard around, just in case somebody lost his head."

Beads of perspiration were pearls on his face. It was over and he knew it.

I said, "I'll do it fast, as I promised. It was renewal time for you. You went to his place last night to discuss it. He used the convincer on you. He didn't show you sun-bathers in the Swiss Alps. He showed you — you with your hair down — and when I say hair down, I'm being poetic. You were convinced, of course, but you didn't like it. A hundred thousand dollars a year, for life, and maybe the ante would go up. You're a fighter, but you had no weapon. Then came a diversion. The sister, bringing a candlestick. The argument between them, the threats on her part. Then everybody leaves, you and Miss Rollins being the last to go. You prowl around, thinking, then you remember — nobody touched that candlestick but the sister. The big idea hits. You go back there. You're wearing your gloves. You knock his brains in with the candlestick, steal the hot film in which you're the male lead, destroy it, and you're all finished — and so is he."

A dry tongue flicked out at dry lips. "But how . . . how . . . ?"

"He had duplicates of all those films, Mr. Hartley. All the duplicates still exist, with the originals. Except yours. Only the duplicate of yours exists. But it exists. And we have it."

He opened the handkerchief now, and wiped his face. He said, "May I . . . may I have a drink?"

"Of course."

He had one, and I had two. I said, very softly, "Can't say I blame you. Can't say a jury would blame you. Can't say even the D.A. would blame you."

"What do I do?" He was breathing heavily. "What do I do, sir?"

"You go down to Headquarters, see Lieutenant Parker, and tell him the whole story. You've got a son at West Point, and a daughter that's engaged to a Governor's son. I'm sure that all this dirty film business need never get to the newspapers. I think the D.A. would talk deal with you. You squashed a leech — I'm sure the D.A. will talk business if you're willing to cop a plea. You do the clean breast — and everything mitigates in your favor. You've got nothing to lose."

He stood up straight, used the handkerchief again. Then he said, "Thank you, young man. Thank you very much."

II.

One hour later, Parker's cigar ashes were making small and varied

clumps over my carpet. We had viewed films, expressed comments and criticisms (amidst envious giggles), and then, austerely, the films had been confiscated by the law. Glasses were clinking now, and ice was jiggling, and I was tying up loose ends for the Lieutenant. I told him about Adams, I told him about Huk, and about Rollins: ". . . Sam Murray had spilled to her about the blackmail pulled on him, and she had used that blackmail for blackmail of her own. Max had a good thing going. If this dame opened up, he was in trouble. So he did it *her* way — gave her a job, then got engaged, then did that first will — but he lay back waiting for his chance. Only with Huk, she was going to beat him to the punch. Nice people."

"Yeah." He drew on his cigar. "Swell job, even, like I said, you get no credit. Except from me, personal credit. Which adds up to favors in the future. But how come every time I asked about that Julia you changed the subject?"

"Guess," I said.

"Was it because you're stuck on her?"

"Guess," I said.

"You were interested in Rollins, in Adams, in Hartley, in Huk — but when it got around to the little sister —"

"She couldn't have done it, Lieutenant."

"But why not? Everything pointed in that direction."

"Physically impossible."

"But why?"

"Because at the time of the crime, she was in bed."

"Bed?" Parker roared. "How the hell could you know that? She wasn't even in her apartment, let alone in bed. She hasn't been back to her apartment yet, as a matter of fact. I still got a man staked out there, got to call him off. Bed," he said dourly. "In bed at the time of the crime."

Ashes drifted toward my carpet. "Now how in all hell *could* you know that?"

"Guess," I said.

MUG AND PRINT

HENRY KANE, whose private richard Peter Chambers appears in this time in *Manhunt* in a complete new novel, *Candlestick*, maintains a steady schedule of work, every afternoon and evening throughout the week, in a New York studio. He prefers to work there, rather than in his out-of-town home, because "less people can bother me in the studio." Besides the several Peter Chambers books, including *Armchair In Hell*, *Report For A Corpse* and others, Kane is the author of the recent suspense novel, *Laughter Came Screaming*, and of many TV and radio shows, including *Danger*, *Suspense* and his new network radio half-hour featuring Chambers.

ERSKINE CALDWELL is one of America's most popular novelists — over thirty million copies of *Tobacco Road*, *God's Little Acre* and his other famous books have been sold to date, in editions published all over the world. Caldwell was born in 1903 in Georgia, son of a Presbyterian minister. He's lived all over the country, holding a variety of jobs including cotton-picking, taxi-driving, cooking and so forth. His latest story for *Manhunt*, *Second Cousin*, is set in the deep-South background which Caldwell has made famous, and we think it's one of the most unusual stories he's written in his long and bestselling career.

RICHARD DEMING, author of this month's *Love Affair*, is the creator of Manville Moon, the one-legged private eye whose cases have been described in *The Gallows In My Garden* and *Tweak The Devil's Nose*. His shorter work has appeared in over thirty magazines and two anthologies, as well as on a couple of TV shows. Deming claims that his hobbies all involve water: "swimming, boating, fishing and as a chaser for rye." He lives in upstate New York.

EVAN HUNTER, whose new Matt Cordell story, *The Beatings*, appears this month, is the author of one of the most widely heralded novels to appear on the literary horizon in some time: his new novel, *The Blackboard Jungle*, which will be published by Simon and Schuster within the next few months. It will also appear serially in the *Ladies' Home Journal* — and it's been bought, for a record $95,000, by M-G-M. Hunter lives on Long Island with his wife and three children.

JONATHAN CRAIG, former night-club pianist turned author, has been doing a lot of research lately, and the result is a fine and realistic novelette, *The Dead Darling*, which *Manhunt* is proud to present. ◆ BEN SMITH's *One Of A Kind* is his first story for *Manhunt*, but not his last — we hope to be presenting more Smith stories soon. ◆ WILLIAM VANCE will be remembered for his fine and detailed *What Am I Doing?* several months ago. He's back this issue with a story we think you'll like even better: *Clean Getaway*. ◆ MURIEL BERNS' first story for *Manhunt* appeared only a few months ago: *The Innocent*. In her second story, *Morning Movie*, she's again taken an unusual situation and a novel twist and come up with a top-notch short-short.

—Continued from back cover

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2 The Case of The HESITANT HOSTESS

Three women make this one a puzzler. The *first* appears in court and says she saw Perry's client at *the scene of the crime.* The *second* shouldn't have appeared at all—but did. The *third* was slated to be Perry's star witness—*but she disappeared completely!*

3 The Case of The GRINNING GORILLA

When Helen Cadmus disappears, Mason isn't sure it's murder. But when he discovers a CORPSE—he knows *this is murder!* But Mason may never LIVE to solve it! For he suddenly finds himself face to face with a monstrous gorilla — *with a long carving knife in his hairy hand!*

4 The Case of The MOTH-EATEN MINK

Mason finds the girl the police have been looking for. "There's a man in room 851," she sobs. "Wants to KILL me!" Just then the police burst into the room. "Don't move!" they order. "A man has been killed in room 851 — *you're both wanted for MURDER!*"

5 The Case of The ANGRY MOURNER

Belle Adrian, Mason's client, is pale as a ghost. A witness SWEARS he saw Belle at the scene of the murder. And Exhibit "A" — the *murder* weapon — is Belle's OWN GUN!

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—Continued on inside cover

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