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HITCHCOCK'S

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

NEW stories presented by the master of SUSPENSE

Dear Readers,

April Fool's Day, as you know, comes but once a year. This by no means implies that foolishness is limited to one day out of each three hundred and sixty-five. That would be too unconscionable a strain, would it not? My profile on this month's cover is in keeping with the April holiday. And it is also something of a commentary on our times; though one may be a bon vivant on the outside, our inner self is hard at work with matters pertinent to one's livelihood.

This brings me quite naturally to my present preoccupation. Of the innumerable letters that I receive from you each month, most want to know what I am up to. Invariably, I assume this query relates to my creative endeavors. I have been working on a film, as yet untitled, with Ernest Lehman, who wrote *North by Northwest.* James Stewart will very likely star in this picture. It will be characterized by suspense, humor, and probably, as in *North by Northwest,* a run for your money.

I trust you will all have a shuddering good time with the small epics that follow.

Alfred Hitchcock

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ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S mystery magazine

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mysteries must end

by Donald Honig

I was sheriff of my county in upstate New York for almost twenty-five years, and I'll tell you that in all that time we had only one murder. Oh, we had other killings, but they came out of two hot-tempered men locking horns man-to-man and I don't count that for murder. Of course, there were some suspicious shootings that occurred during the hunting season, but I'm not talking about any of them either. I'm talking about Aaron Kimball who murdered his wife and when, finally, the murder was solved, I experienced a strange regret . . . but let me tell what happened first.

Aaron Kimball was a morose, stocky little fellow. He walked head-down, always trying to avoid speaking to anyone. Like so many reserved men, he was possessed of deceptive physical strength. He lived in a cottage on a quiet street more or less away from the heart of town. It had been his parents' place and before that his grandparents', and it looked like a place that had been left from one generation to another, too. There were shingles flown from the slanted roof and never replaced, and broken shutters that hung over the windows the way you hold a newspaper by one corner, and the front garden, well, that resembled in many respects the town's first cemetery, which stands alongside the highway now and is so old that mourned and mourners alike have gone to it and been forgotten. Aaron just let the weeds grow till they reached window height; then he would scythe them off. And there was the old dead pine that used to shade the house until it had been hit by lightning some years before. Now it just stood there a hollow trunk, with time having shorn off most of its limbs. And you couldn't see the fieldstone path anymore; it was so overgrown. And the fence pickets leaned on each other like so many drunkards.

His unsightly, disintegrating house didn't seem to bother Aaron. He discouraged visitors. When he wanted companionship, which was infrequent enough to be newsworthy, he'd walk into town and

The French insist, and with characteristic Gallic gesticulations, that in order to solve a murder all one needs do is cherchez la femme. *Our drama also requires this. And in it, as a bow to inflation, "the woman" also doubles as victim.*

have a few bottles of ale. He could be amiable company when he chose, although still very reserved. People said that with his money he could afford to be aloof, but that was an exaggeration. Aaron didn't have that kind of wealth. His parents had left him some money and he owned a bit of real estate; so he was comfortable, but not rich.

One day he announced that he was married. Not that he was engaged, or going to get married; but that he was married. It seems that on one of his infrequent bus trips to the city, he had found himself a woman, married her, and brought her back. With the announcement, Aaron also said that his house would be open for a little celebration. Most everyone went, to meet the bride. She was not a pretty woman, perhaps a bit homely, but quiet and gentle-seeming. Aaron appeared quite content.

People thought that with him married now, Aaron might change his moody ways. And for awhile he did. He appeared around town more frequently and would be more friendly. But then, after about a year had elapsed, he started falling back to the old ways again. He'd pass you on the street without so much as a nod. If you spoke, he'd freeze up and look over your shoulder till you were through speaking; then he'd move away.

Annie, his wife, didn't have much more to say than Aaron, but in her it was shyness, nervousness—you could see that. She was sweet and friendly, but it was obvious she would appreciate it if you wouldn't say much more than good morning to her. Of her background we knew little. She seemed to have no family at all. At least, no one ever came to see her and she never went to see anyone, and Jim in the post office said she neither sent nor received any mail.

Of course, the neighbors got to reporting that Aaron and his wife weren't getting on so well. We heard about some pretty shrill arguments and even that Aaron hit her once in awhile. I never like to listen to that sort of thing. The way I feel about it, people shouldn't talk about those things. Whenever I said this to any of them they would come back at me with, "Well, Marv, if they wouldn't give us something to talk about, then we wouldn't talk about them. We don't tell Aaron Kimball to pop his wife." That's the way it is in a small community.

Then one night, it was late November I recall, just before the first snows, I was sitting in my office with some of the boys hav-

ing an unofficial game of poker, when in came Fred Jefferson, Aaron's neighbor from across the road. He had quite a bit of excitement in his face, his eyebrows hoisted up in little woolly arcs. He couldn't wait to tell.

"I think there's been trouble over in Aaron Kimball's," he said, the breath gone clear out of him like he'd run all the way.

"Trouble of what sort?" I asked.

"I don't know, Marv. The wife and me, we were sitting in the living room just about to put the bellows to the fire, when we heard the scream—Annie's scream."

"She screamed?" I asked.

"Yes, sir, she screamed. Real sudden like. Just the one sharp loud scream and that was all, like somebody put fire to her."

"That all?" I asked. "Just the scream?" The way I said it maybe I had a skeptical inflection in my voice, because Jefferson got indignant and offended.

"You didn't hear it, Marv. It sounded . . . it sounded . . . horrible . . . like something horrible happened in there."

"Did you go on over?" I asked.

"No, sir," he said stoutly. "I came straight here."

So we went to Aaron's house, all of us. I wasn't too pleased to be going, but because Jefferson had come in to report it, I felt I had to. I remember saying to him as I put on my overcoat that it had better be something sufficient he was bringing us out for, because for one thing he was interrupting a good poker game, and for another it was Aaron Kimball's house we were going to. Well, it was something sufficient all right; so sufficient that, in a sense, I was out on it for more than fifteen years.

It was a chill night. We could see our breath on the moonlight as we turned into Aaron's street. Jefferson and the boys waited out in the street, while I opened the gate and walked up to the door. I knocked and in about a minute Aaron opened up. He held the door away just a few inches, just enough for his face to come through. It was his way of not inviting me in, his way of telling me to be brief. He didn't appear surprised at seeing me, neither was he concerned. He just gave me that odd, rather terse, out-of-patience look that he always had. I caught sight of a ladder leaning against the wall and it struck me as strange.

"Aaron," I said, "has there been any trouble here?"

"No trouble, Marv," he said.

"You sure? Where's Annie?"

"She's not here. She left for the city this morning."

That was all. That was all that passed between us. I apologized for the bother and went back to the others. We went across to Jefferson's house and I made one of the boys sit by the window and watch Aaron's place. Then I told Jefferson what Aaron had said.

"That's impossible," Jefferson said. "I heard the scream clear as daylight, and so did Hannah."

Hannah was his wife. She confirmed what he said, and if Jefferson was a flighty and excitable fellow, she was not a woman to hear a scream if there was no scream.

"Well," I said, "if Aaron is not telling the truth then he must have done something to her. Beat her up, probably, and now he's ashamed of it."

"But why should he say she's gone away?" one of the boys asked.

"I don't know," I said.

I had an uneasy feeling, hard to explain, but sticking like a burr. I couldn't say that Aaron had had an odd look about him, he *always* had that; maybe it was the way he'd talked. When a policeman comes to your house late at night, you just don't stand there like he did, as if he'd been expecting me, as if he'd known what I was there for. Well, whatever it was, I made one of the boys sit the rest of the night in Jefferson's house (over Jefferson's mild protest) and watch Aaron's place. I wasn't going to take any chances.

The next day, I asked around to see if anybody had seen Annie leave for the city. Nobody had. That didn't prove that she hadn't, of course. But it was unlikely she could have got on the bus and not be seen, because we have a bunch of old-timers who have nothing else to do but sit on the bench in the terminal and see who comes and who goes.

So I was fairly well convinced Annie hadn't gone anywhere. This meant I had to go back to Aaron and be a bit more point-blank with him.

I kept a man in Jefferson's house all the time, rotating them on three hour shifts. Jeff filled in part of the time; like most men, he got great excitement out of playing policeman. The report from all my spies was the same, however: nothing. Aaron had not stepped out of the house. His front door had not opened once. It meant that if it had been Annie who had screamed the night before, she was still in there.

The next day I went to see Aaron again. By now my suspicions were beginning to labor. When he answered my knock, I asked him to let me inside. He did.

"Where's Annie, Aaron?" I asked.

"I told you," he said.

"You said she left town. But nobody saw her. But she *was* heard to scream the other night. Now, maybe you'd better tell where she is."

But he stayed right with what he had said originally. Annie had gone to the city. That was all he knew. For how long she had gone, or why, he said he didn't know. Then I told him I was going to have to take a look around. He said he wouldn't like that, but that I could go ahead. There wasn't much to search, just the five rooms and the cellar. I found no Annie. But in her closet I found all her clothes, including the only winter coat she was ever seen to wear. Also I found her bag which had in it her change purse and her keys and what few personal papers a woman carried. Aaron said he couldn't explain this. He just walked around behind me and watched everything I did.

"You and Annie argue much?" I asked.

"Never," he said. Which was a lie because they were known to lift their voices pretty sharp sometimes.

So I went away, thoroughly dissatisfied. As we knew, Aaron had not once gone out of the house since the night of the scream. So when I got the necessary papers to institute a more thorough search, I limited it to inside the house. We came in full force and went over the rooms and the cellar from top to bottom. Once we found some loose bricks in the cellar and a cry went up. But when we pried them up we found nothing. We even went tapping along the walls looking for some secret passageway, and, remembering the ladder, I had the men go over the roof very carefully. We shined a light up the chimney; we looked for trapdoors and tunnels; we did everything but dismantle the house board by board. We found nothing.

Aaron became incensed with all this. He accused us of desecrating his ancestral home (that was what he called the run-down little cottage), of slandering him, and so on. It was a rare display for him. But I didn't listen to any of it. A week had gone by and no Annie. If she had gone away, we asked Aaron, why hadn't she written? No reply. He had told all he knew, he said.

Then we began to search outside. But I held little hope for any success. From the time Jefferson and his wife had heard the scream to the time we came to the house,

not more than five and less than ten minutes had elapsed. And Mrs. Jefferson had been at the window for at least two or three minutes of that time. So even if Aaron had carried Annie out of the house, where could he have so securely put her in so short a space of time? As I said, there wasn't much hope, but we looked anyway. We searched the woods around his house; we covered every inch for a hundred yards around, but found nothing.

Then the real winter set in and it snowed hard. Even though Aaron soon became snowbound, I still had a man watching the house day and night. But all Aaron did was go to and from the store. We examined his garbage every time he put out a pail, and found nothing out of the way. But I was determined to overlook nothing.

Then three months passed. Reluctantly, I took my man away from the house, even though I was still convinced Annie was still in there somewhere. But I had exhausted every possibility. The district attorney said he couldn't see any legal action that he could take, since no evidence whatsoever had been found to warrant such action.

Then one day I began to think: Maybe Aaron is telling the truth. Maybe Jefferson and his wife were wrong about the scream; maybe it was something from the woods they heard. Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe we're all wrong. Maybe Annie just left him—and that wouldn't have been so unlikely either, considering the wretched little character that Aaron was. That idea began to grow in me until one morning I met Aaron on the street. I didn't let him know what I was thinking, of course.

"Aaron," I said, "I still suspect you, you know, and still intend someday to prove my suspicions."

He nodded, very politely.

"Just because we've stopped watching you so closely," I said, "doesn't mean we've ceased to suspect you. As far as I'm concerned, as long as I'm sheriff this case is going to stay open."

"Yes," he said nodding. He stood there another moment, patient and polite, then when he saw I was through went on his way.

I went back to the office and suddenly the realization struck me, removing from my mind once and for all the idea that I could be wrong: *He didn't even bother to deny he was guilty!*

Then time started to pass and people gradually began to forget. Some, finally, grew to accept Aaron's story that Annie had left him;

others just lost interest. But I never did. I couldn't help it. It was in no way a matter of vindictiveness on my part, and after awhile it even ceased to be a matter of the law getting its man. It became a personal thing. I knew I was right. I knew that somehow I had been deceived. It became pride. It was the only mystery we'd ever had and I wanted to solve it. I wanted to know where and how I had been deceived. Sometimes it threatened to become an obsession. I would be sitting idly and the foolish thought would steal into my head: *If he would tell me what he did with her, dammit, I wouldn't even arrest him; if he would only tell me.*

His face never betrayed a thing. Aaron remained the same. His habits, his routine, his bearing, never changed. He came and went the same as ever, coolly polite when we met—not friendly, for he was never that, but in that eternally aloof way of his, saying what he had to and keeping people at their distance.

The years passed, a lot of years, and I can truthfully say that I thought every day of Aaron and Annie. It got to be a joke with my family and close friends. On my birthday and at Christmas somebody would invariably say, "Marv, I'm going to give you something you've wanted for a long time." "What's that?" I'd say. "Annie Kimball," they'd say, and laugh. I tried not to show anger at such flippancy. People just never seemed to realize how important it was to me. When my oldest son suffered through a long, painful illness, I was able to fill up those agonizing, uncertain nights thinking about Annie Kimball.

At times I wanted to go to Aaron and beat the truth out of him. I would loathe him. At other times I secretly envied him because he knew the answer to the riddle. And then one day I heard that Aaron was dying. He hadn't been seen for almost a week. And when someone went to investigate, they found him lying in bed hardly able to move. The doctor said that Aaron had very little time left. I felt a strange panic. I told the doctor I had to speak to Aaron, that it was absolutely imperative. Reluctantly the doctor agreed.

I went into the bedroom and closed the door. I sat down at the bedside. Aaron looked very pale and wan. But when he looked at me I'll swear if I didn't see, for the first time, a faint glimmer of humor in his face, a wry, almost sardonic humor.

"Aaron," I whispered, "you're very ill. You know that?"

He nodded.

"There isn't much time," I said. "Isn't there something you want to tell me?"

Now he smiled, very weakly, and again wry and sad.

"Yes, Marv," he said. "But I don't think I will."

And he didn't. He died that night. I went to see him in the funeral chapel, and I followed him to the cemetery and watched them put him away, inside of me still that small restless fragment of obsession, for even at the funeral I was still half-expecting him to speak, to divulge his secret. After Aaron's death, the unanswered question, the unsolved mystery, remained with me more strongly and more persistently than ever. It started to haunt me. I would go back to his now empty house time after time and sit there among the dust and the cob-webs as if still waiting to hear the sound of Aaron's voice.

I was strangely saddened when I learned, about two months after Aaron's death, that the house had been sold to a realtor who was going to tear it down and build several two-family homes on the property. I was saddened because of my strange attachment to the house. It was now more than fifteen years since Annie Kimball's disappearance, and I was the last person left in town who still actively thought of her.

I didn't want to go, but I forced myself to stand across the street and watch the men demolish the house. There were two on the roof ripping off the shingles, while others were hacking away inside. Outside, a bulldozer was tearing up the front yard. And then some of the children began to scream, and then I saw it too. I started running across the street, flushed with anger and shame. I saw it lying there and I was thinking, *My God, so that was where he put the body*. How he must have been laughing at me all those years! How he just left it there and continued to leave it there, even when he could have found a safer place later on. And how many times had I passed it right by . . .

So now it's over and I'm sorry, in a way, because I'm an old man now and I'm going to miss thinking about Annie Kimball. Now I have nothing to think about, except how Aaron Kimball fooled me. Fooled and defeated me so simply. Not even burying her, but leaving her standing erect all the time, and she would have stood that way until doomsday, if that bulldozer hadn't tipped over the dead pine and split it wide open, emptying her skeleton onto the ground.

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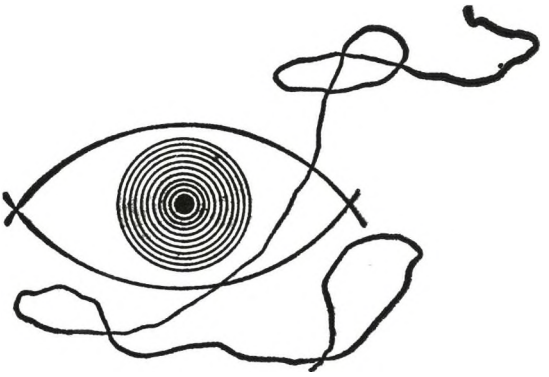

by Bryce Walton

County District Attorney Irving Jameson's call had been more than usually peremptory. Sheriff Ryan Bonley was now doing his best to oblige and hurry over to the DA's office, although he was not the hurrying type of man. His shoulders hunched, his shaggy head lowered, he moved rather ponderously through crisp autumn air, looking outwardly the way he sometimes felt, like a large but genial old dog, perhaps a Great Dane. The sort of sad-eyed brute that can always be trusted to retrieve things and protect small children.

Like the village, Sheriff Bonley's personality was ill-equipped to deal with murder. The fact that it had been a very bloody, double murder only made his position that much less appropriate. He shared the general attitude of the town that any sort of murder should never have occurred there, as indeed none had—for several generations —until the Peaseleys were killed three months ago.

Murder was simply out of place in Lakeside, an old, proper, even puritanical community. Furthermore, murder was bad publicity. It tended to discourage vacationers who appreciated a quiet, trusting atmosphere of summer people and of year-rounders who left front doors unlocked and windows open.

THE PRIVATE EYE OF DR. GOLYNSKA

It is not at all sporting to catch a murderer by extra-ordinary means—radar, parakeets, mind-readers, that sort of thing. And what is more, such tactics might serve a crushing blow to the crimes we have come to know and enjoy.

The bodies of Mr. and Mrs. Peaseley had never been found, but there was no doubt of their having been the victims of a most gruesome butchery before their remains had been mysteriously disposed of. A vast amount of blood as well as other splattered evidence made murder an unavoidable diagnosis.

The town demanded that the murder virus be exposed and destroyed, but Sheriff Bonley was thoroughly stumped. Despite pressure on him, he could have accepted his defeat philosophically. He was not a perfectionist, nor was he afflicted with false pride. He knew little about murder investigation, and if the villagers were dissatisfied with his human frailty they could elect someone else. District Attorney Jameson was too young and ambitious to accept defeat. He intended to become at least State Governor, and this unsolved murder was both irritant and obstacle.

"If we intend to be re-elected to public office," Jameson said, with uninhibited directness after Bonley had sat down, "we must find ourselves a murderer."

Bonley nodded uneasily. He sat in Jameson's neat and coldly modern office, his thick shoulders hunched to his ears, his huge hands hanging limply, and at odds with their surroundings, over the arms of a chrome chair. In Jameson's presence, he always felt as if he had been tossed into a fast race and handicapped with leaded shoes.

Avoiding Jameson's direct, snapping gaze, Bonley also managed to be uncomfortably direct. "I've been Sheriff for near thirty years," he said. "I don't mind if I retire."

"I mind," Jameson interrupted coldly. "I'm sure you do, too."

"I've done my best," Bonley said.

"Of course." Jameson's lean figure stopped pacing. His black crew-cut head angled down at Bonley like a bird eyeing a morning worm. "So have I, but our best hasn't been good enough up to this crucial point. But we have a public duty, Sheriff. We can't admit defeat. I refuse to admit any such thing. I won't let you admit it either."

"I don't know where to go from where I am now," Bonley said.

"Big-city DA's also have unsolved murders," Jameson said, and his face lighted momentarily with naked envy. "But big cities have a quantitive and statistical advantage. They are blessed with many murders. They can ignore the failures and publicize the successfully prosecuted cases. But here I've had two murders and two unsolved murders, a one-hundred percent failure. I won't stand still for it! Murder must out, Sheriff!"

"It ought to," Bonley admitted carefully.

"If even a part of the victims had been found," Jameson said, "that would have helped considerably."

Color rose up through Bonley's hanging jowls. "I looked. I even used Pat Shriver's bloodhounds."

"So we've reached a dead end —by ordinary means. So I've called in special outside means. They arrived from New York this morning and will be here in ten minutes."

"Special means?" Bonley said.

"Mind-readers."

Sheriff Bonley moved and talked slowly. His thought processes also worked with corresponding lack of seeming urgency. He took some pride in feeling that the decisions that he finally reached possessed a special solidity. He stared at Jameson for sometime before repeating, "Mind-readers?"

"Yes, yes," Jameson said impatiently. "Mind-readers. And I expect your complete cooperation."

Bonley blinked slowly like a frog.

Jameson nervously glanced at his watch, then hurriedly explained.

Jameson had received the letter from New York a week ago, offering the services of Dr. Anton Golynska and Mr. Hugo Stege in the Peaseley murder case. No fee was expected. Their only interest was in pushing back the frontiers of psychological science. Dr. Golynska was particularly interested in that relatively new and controversial branch of psychology in-

volving extra-sensory perception, or ESP, so effectively popularized by Dr. Rhine and associates at Duke University.

Attached to the letter were imposing personal references and professional qualifications, which Jameson, though at first dubious, proceeded to check. He found them authentic and excitingly impressive.

Dr. Golynska was head of New York's *East Side Communal Hospital,* an M.D., a famous practising psychiatrist. He was a noted diagnostician, daring theoritician, president of the American Institute of Applied Psychiatry, member in excellent standing of the American Medical Association, President of the American Foundation for Mental Health, and co-founder of the American College for the Advancement of Parapsychology.

Hugo Stege's dossier was also impressive. Although there was no quick way to check his qualifications with authorities in Europe, the endorsement of a man like Dr. Golynska was certainly sufficient.

Stege's dossier included a list of crimes in Europe that he had been instrumental in solving, complete with names, dates, places, and European officials available for verifications. The Dutchman's list of solved crimes was remarkable, and was substantiated by affidavits and magazine articles by the Chief of the Harrlhem Police, of the Delft Police, the Chief Justice of Leeuwarden, and the Chief of the Customs Department of Enschede. He was noted for amazing work at the Parapsychology Institute of the University of Utrecht where its director, Dr. Tenhaeff, considered Stege, "the man with the X-ray mind."

Stege had also worked with the Viennese Institute of Criminal Telepathy, and had been a regular employee of the police department in Vienna where, in a state of "trance," he had worked on 44 criminal cases and solved 33 out of the 44.

Now, sponsored in the United States by Dr. Golynska who had once studied at the Vienna Institute, Hugo Stege was in America, confident that, among other cases, he would clear up the mystery of the disappearance of Judge Crater 25 years ago, and would reveal the full story of the Lindbergh kidnaping.

So far, the letter explained, Stege's talents had been hampered by legal redtape. Obtaining court orders to act on Stege's recommendations, Dr. Golynska said, had been most difficult. United States law-enforcement agencies, Dr. Golynska also pointed out, were quite behind the times as

compared with forward-looking, open-minded European police forces that now used telepathic minds as a matter of course in the investigation of crimes.

New York tabloids had publicized the Peaseley case. Lakeville, after all, was a convenient distance from New York. Hugo Stege certainly appeared confident that he could be helpful. And Dr. Golynska had a great deal of confidence in Hugo Stege. He felt that if Stege could solve one big murder, the U.S. courts might take a more liberal view of his astonishing abilities. It might also clear the way to more general acceptance of the extra-sensory powers of men like Hugo Stege.

Perhaps Jameson would appreciate the opportunity to cooperate, would want to be a pioneer on a new frontier in the solution of crimes and help break the provincial ice?

Yes, indeed, Jameson had decided. No matter what the means, he wanted to crack the Peaseley murder case. And, as he explained to Sheriff Bonley, they had nothing to lose and everything to gain by experimentation.

Smiling, Jameson added, "You know, Sheriff, that Pascal, the French philosopher, arrived at his conclusion about God from listening to his gambling friends. Pascal said, 'Either God is, or he isn't, but to which side shall we incline? The only solution is to be on God's side. If He exists, you win all; and if He does not, you lose nothing.' I see no reason, Sheriff, why we can't apply the same logic to Hugo Stege."

When Sheriff Bonley got around to giving a heavy, somewhat dubious nod, a buzzer indicated that the outer reception room door had opened.

Bonley stared at the end of his cigar. It had gone out.

Dr. Golynska, tweedy, reserved, confident, lean and tanned, wasted no time. He sat Hugo Stege in a chair and immediately, by pressing the man's slightly bulging eyes, put him into what he said was a trance. Hugo Stege was a little dark man with a greatly oversized head. His suit didn't seem to fit him properly.

"My grandmother believed in such things," Sheriff Bonley finally commented, uneasily. "I never took much to supernatural shenanigans."

Dr. Golynska frowned pityingly. "It's time to forget terms such as supernatural, mentalist, medium and clairvoyance. You must bear in mind that ESP has won scientific reputability and acceptance."

"I didn't mean—" Bonley began as Jameson gave him a scathing glance.

Dr. Golynska interrupted, "There is, as there has always been, a great deal of ignorance and misinformation in the world. Hugo Stege simply has extra-sensory perception." He turned, his hand still palming Hugo's eyes, and gave a quick, assured lecture. "If it weren't for this ignorance, Mr. Stege would have been given the opportunity sooner to solve this crime. Those having his special ability could prevent crime altogether. Everywhere, the police are wasting, marking time, standing still in a medieval backwash. Crime is on the increase. Sooner or later, law enforcement agencies will be seeking men like Mr. Stege, as a drowning man looks for a life preserver. When crime investigators, using every method of modern science at their disposal, come to a dead end, they will have only one remaining chance—extra-sensory perception, special brains such as that of Hugo Stege."

Dr. Golynska smiled at Bonley, but it was purely facial. Bonley flushed. He knew when he had been put in his place.

"You have the article belonging to one of the deceased victims, Mr. Jameson," Dr. Golynska said.

Jameson handed him a blood-stained woman's houseslipper. Dr. Golynska dropped it into Stege's hands, which were dimpled like a baby's.

Stege mumbled something.

"ESP sensitivity is opening up," Dr. Golynska said softly, "much as one would uncover a radar screen." He gave Bonley another purely facial grin. "There'll be no table-tipping, Sheriff, no ghostly trumpets floating in midair, or a stream of ectoplasm. Mr. Stege is extra-sensitive to brainwaves; it is that simple. With this slipper, he gets the brain-scent, if I may make an analogy to a bloodhound."

Dr. Golynska's hand snapped away from Stege's closed eyes. "You are," he said with cool confidence, "going back to April sixth, Hugo. It is night. What do you see?"

"I see the face of the murderer," Stege said in a thick guttural.

"Ah so, please describe that face, Hugo."

"Dark, curly black hair. Blue eyes. Like a sheep's face."

"Please go on, Hugo."

"I see a purple scar on the left side, perhaps a birthmark."

Sheriff Bonley jerked the cigar from his mouth and with what was, for him, astounding alacrity, stood up. Jameson smirked with eager triumph.

"Why, that sounds like Steve

Harrison," Bonley whispered.

"He's your murderer," Dr. Golynska said and casually lit a cigarette. "Who is this Steve Harrison, may I ask?"

As Jameson quickly explained who Steve Harrison was, Sheriff Bonley studied his cigar, occasionally switching his steady puzzled gaze to the knobby, oversized head of Hugo Stege. Once, Bonley shivered. He crossed and recrossed his legs. Later, he took a handkerchief from his hip pocket and wiped his forehead.

On the morning of April the sixth, at approximately 3 A.M., Steve Harrison who, with his wife, was a neighbor of the Peasleys, had phoned in to Sheriff Bonley that he had heard screams from the Peaseley house. Looking in, he had seen evidence of carnage, but none of the Peaseleys. He had run back to his house and had sounded hysterical, almost incoherent, when he called Bonley.

No one else, including Harrison's wife, Lois, had heard screams. This was possibly due to Steve's having been outside at the time. He often took long walks alone during the night.

Abnormal behavior, Jameson admitted, for anyone living in Lakeside. But then, Steve Harrison was hardly considered normal. Dr. Golynska was handed a file folder which Jameson explained contained Steve's *Official U.S. Army Record.* A single page bore the heading, *Supplementary Medical Report, Psychiatric Division.*

"Subject showed marked antipathy to his mother. This aversion seems to be extremely violent in nature. Under certain stresses, subject might find pleasure in hurting a rejecting woman."

"Ha!" exclaimed Dr. Golynska and tossed the file back across Jameson's desk. "And what other contributory statistics do we have to support Hugo's extra-sensory vision?"

Harrison had been considered extremely neurotic, if not psychopathic, since returning from Korea. He refused to work and support his wife. She had been forced to take a job as a waitress in a local diner. Apparently all Steve did was drift about the lake area, or sleep in his back yard.

Dr. Golynska grinned at Bonley. "This Harrison seems such a likely suspect, Sheriff. Perhaps you were moved by hometown loyalty to give him the benefit of a considerable doubt."

Bonley's jowls reddened and quivered slightly. "He was a suspect. It was in the papers. We questioned him, and his wife, but there was no evidence and no witnesses. There was nothing we

could prove." He glanced at Jameson for support, but received none. "Anyway, I've known Steve since he was knee high to a pony. He got hit hard on Korea, but I don't figure he'd do anything like what was done to the Peaseleys."

"Of course not," Dr. Golynska said smoothly. "That sort of thing is never done by the sort of people who usually do it. However, I'll stake my professional reputation strictly on Hugo's statement. Harrison is your murderer. If he were arrested now and charged on Hugo's testimony alone, I'm sure a confession would soon be forthcoming. But, unfortunately, a parapsychological investigator's testimony in court has perhaps even less status than a lie detector's. Evidence from either one is not legally admitted as evidence. But both lie detectors and a man with Hugo's talents can help clear the innocent, trace criminals and evidence. And they can often cause a criminal to confess his guilt."

To gather further evidence, Dr. Golynska suggested they go right to the scene of the crime, preferably to Harrison's house. Brain waves would, he explained, be more intense there and would register more directly. Dr. Golynska had no doubt that this further evidence would be of the incontrovertible sort that would lead to a quick and successful prosecution and conviction of the guilty.

But there's no evidence at all that Steve's guilty, Sheriff Bonley thought as they walked out to Jameson's car. Just Hugo Stege's testimony. Bonley knew nothing about ESP, but he knew that no person could check Hugo Stege's methods, or even question his conclusions—not without being blessed with ESP himself.

Maybe, Bonley thought, my hunch about Steve's innocence is as good a kind of ESP as Hugo Stege's. But he didn't say anything as they drove to the Harrison house on the outskirts of town. He wanted to say something, protest, question the procedure in some way, but he couldn't think of an approach, and by the time he had one taking form in his mind, they were being admitted to the house by Mrs. Harrison.

Lois Harrison received them in a detached manner, neither friendly nor unfriendly. She asked if they wanted tea. Dr. Golynska said that would be nice and began admiring various interesting antiques, including the tapered mouldings of the iron fireplace, Sheffield candlesticks and a riveted rose-bowl.

Looking at the woman's rawboned figure as she walked out of the room toward the kitchen,

Sheriff Bonley again felt sorry for her. She had once been attractive, but now seemed deliberately to try to make herself uninteresting to the eye. She wore no makeup. Her dress was shapeless. She regarded the world with what seemed to be hopeless resignation.

She brought in tea and cakes on a tray. Jameson explained the purpose of Dr. Golynska's and Hugo Stege's presence. Mrs. Harrison's face colored and took on some animation as she looked at Stege. He slouched in a chair looking sullenly into the fireplace. He refused to partake of cakes and tea.

"Mr. Stege finds things," Jameson explained, "like a water diviner or dowser does."

Mrs. Harrison's eyes lighted up. "I'm glad to know you believe in that, too," she said. "I found out really frightening things from a medium once during a seance. And my grandfather says that a dowser found water around here years ago."

Dr. Golynska smiled. "Mr. Stege finds other things besides water, but the principle is much the same."

"Steve isn't here now," Mrs. Harrison said later, as Dr. Golynska, still crouched on the silken settee, continued with his intent gobbling of little cakes and noisy consumption of hot tea. There were crumbs on the front of his tweed jacket. "Steve just went out for a walk."

There was the continued delicate clicking of cups on saucers, as Sheriff Bonley shifted uneasily. He wiped his forehead several times. Once he started to light his cigar, then remembered that Mrs. Harrison didn't approve of smoking or drinking. He turned and stared out at the lake. A vapor hung over it and drifted through the naked trees along the shore.

"Mr. Stege," Mrs. Harrison asked shyly, "do you use a willow wand?"

Stege gave a surly jerk of his knobby head.

"Unnecessary props," Dr. Golynska said. "The extra-sensory brain receives information directly. Special brain centers react to certain radiations. It's a simple physical phenomenon, like radio, television and radar."

"How does he do it, Doctor?" she asked. "I mean—"

"How do you do it, Hugo?" Dr. Golynska asked with a slight smile.

"Just say what comes into my mind," mumbled Hugo Stege.

"No one can define how these forces operate," Dr. Golynska said, pausing with another cake halfway to his mouth. "One day soon they will be properly measured and explained. But a lack of understanding of a process doesn't cancel the

results, does it? Electromagnetic waves were unknown until the last century. They were discovered, not invented. Potentially, the power was there all the time, just as ESP has been waiting. So far, there is no known scientific means of influencing minds or objects over a distance by the brain. Just the same, extra-sensory perception exists, and has been proven by scientifically validated tests over and over in laboratories and other places. It has always existed, just as electromagnetic fields have always existed—even though we haven't as yet constructed a scientific theory for it. After all, we're ignorant of most things. We can't even, for example, explain what happens when electricity enters one end of a wire and emerges from the other end. Still, a man dies from electric shock!"

Stege turned abruptly and his bugging eyes fixed on Mrs. Harrison. "I would like to talk with her alone, please."

Dr. Golynska said, "Mrs. Harrison, you have undoubtedly absorbed many useful impressions, having been near the scene of the crime. Perhaps you have a lot of unconscious information. And Hugo, you might say, wishes to tune in." Golynska stood up and looked at the others. "It's better if they're alone. Other minds in the immediate area interfere, much like interfering wave bands in radio, or even static electricity."

Mrs. Harrison moistened her pale lips. "Of course," she agreed. "Anything to help solve those terrible crimes."

They waited silently some distance from the rear of the house, for Hugo's special tuning-in interview to end. Unvoiced tension mounted in Sheriff Bonley who stood apart from the others. He shifted from one foot to the other and hunched his shoulders. He felt cold.

Finally, Stege came out and Dr. Golynska promptly palmed Stege's x-ray eyes, putting him into a trance state. "You are going back," he said, "to the night of April six."

Stege nodded and started walking in a crisscross pattern, cutting over fences, fields and the creek. He began working back toward the rear of the Peaseley house. Once he stopped and turned this way and that like a spasmodic weather vane. "The bodies are buried over there," he finally said, pointing toward an old dilapidated barn.

Bonley gulped and rubbed his throat as he followed the others in a fast walk toward the barn, hidden by skeletal trees from the

rear of the Peaseley house. Near the barn was a sea of dead weeds that crackled underfoot, and that had been felled by a power mower during the summer.

Stege pointed to a weed-rotted area ten feet from the barn. "Dig here," he said.

"It is morning, April the sixth," Dr. Golynska said. "What do you see?"

"The murderer, the man with the birthmark is carrying a woman's body. He drops it on the ground here. He pulls up weeds, throws rocks aside. There—rotting boards are uncovered. An old abandoned well. He throws boards away, drops body into well. He goes back to house, returns with man's body, drops it into well, puts boards back, then rocks. It is later, he is running a mower—cutting weeds—covering rocks and well with weeds . . ."

Dr. Golynska turned toward Bonley who stood with his mouth hanging open. "I'm sure, Sheriff, that the neighbors will remember Mr. Harrison using a power mower here right after the murders took place."

Bonley felt himself nodding heavily as if he, too, had somehow been put into a trance. Then Jameson told him to bring shovels from the Harrison place, on the double.

Half an hour later, they found the rocks and then the decayed boards of the ancient well. That Stege had misjudged the exact location by about fifty feet was hardly important considering what they found in the bottom of the well.

"I suggest," Dr. Golynska said, "that we bring Mr. Harrison here to confront him with this evidence. Here and now is the psychologically appropriate place and time to question him. He can hardly deny his guilt long now, I'm sure."

But his guilt hasn't been established at all, Bonley thought desperately, *it hasn't at all.*

"That seems a right procedure, don't you think so, Sheriff?" Jameson asked.

Bonley only stared, unable to voice any logical protest.

"He might not necessarily confess even now," Jameson said.

"He'll crack," Dr. Golynska said. "They usually do. The burden of guilt is too great. They crack. They're really grateful for the opportunity to get rid of the guilt."

Steve Harrison woke up, perspiring heavily and staring at the ceiling as if, at first, he didn't know where he was. Then he remembered coming back from a

walk by the lake, being dizzy and too tired to stay awake. Lois had offered him lunch. Instead of eating, he had dropped off in the bedroom. The guest bedroom. He didn't blame Lois for sleeping in a separate bedroom these days. He wouldn't have blamed her if she had moved out, to another town, and forgotten him. His nightmares, his nightly outcries, woke her, disturbed her sleep.

He had slept only a few minutes. So it seemed. Still he felt as if the nightmare had gone on for hours. But now it was over, until the next time, the next sleep. The muddy faces charging in through the half-frozen mud of Yalu. The man with his legs blown off screaming and crawling toward Steve, begging for help. Steve couldn't give it. Shoot, shoot, someone screamed at him, but he ran instead. Ran and ran. It was always the same dream, except that the faces came closer each time. What would happen when they finally reached him? That was what made it increasingly more difficult to go to sleep. At least during the daytime, there were living people to talk and listen to. But recently that wasn't so good either, because people sort of ignored him.

He heard voices in the living room. He recognized the voice of Sheriff Bonley. Good old Ryan Bonley. But for some reason he felt panicky as he moved quickly out of bed and stood listening near the door. He wanted to run. Bonley had questioned him so many times about those Peaseley murders.

He shouldn't, he thought, have called in that night. That had been a bad mistake. But why was he so frightened by a visit from Sheriff Bonley? He opened the bedroom door and walked toward the parlor. Then he knew why he was afraid. There were three other men. Strangers. He started to turn and run away. Lois said, "Oh, Steve, we have company."

Then he heard Sheriff Bonley say thickly, "We want to show you something, Steve."

Steve shook his head and tried to pull back away from Sheriff Bonley and Jameson as they forced him outside and toward the old abandoned well. No, he protested, he didn't remember any old well being here. No, he kept saying.

They forced him to look down. "God," he whispered. His knees went limp. He sagged. "Why," he mumbled, "that looks like Mrs. Peaseley's face down there!"

"Yes," Dr. Golynska said casually, "she's still down there with Mr. Peaseley. Where you dropped them, Harrison."

Steve was on his knees, sliding

back. "No," he repeated. "That's not so."

"Hugo," Dr. Golynska said, "is this the murderer?"

"Yes," Stege said.

Mrs. Harrison swayed and leaned for support against the barn.

"Mrs. Harrison," Dr. Golynska said, "what really happened on the sixth of April? Tell us, if you know. The loyalty of marriage has no place in this fiendish murder. Tell the truth. This man, even though he's your husband, is a dangerous murderer. And it's your duty—your public duty—to tell what you know."

"I don't know what happened," she said faintly.

"Your husband wasn't in the house that morning around three?"

"No."

"When did he come in?"

"About three-thirty. He woke me. He seemed crazy, the way he went into the bathroom and kept washing his hands. Then he called Sheriff Bonley. 'I heard screams,' he said to me. 'Something's happened to the Peaseleys.' I asked him how he knew that. He flew into a rage and struck me. 'Don't ask me that!' he yelled. 'Don't ever ask me that again!' "

"No," Harrison said, in a general, ambiguous denial. He was down on his knees near the well, his body bowed over. "Let me sleep. I want to sleep. Just sleep."

They kept him there. They kept him there near the well and kept grilling him until he broke. Sheriff Bonley stood back near the barn and watched. He refused to enter into the questioning. After awhile he began to feel a growing nausea.

"And you don't remember anything else, Harrison?" Dr. Golynska asked.

Harrison's glazed eyes stared at a reddish light hanging over the well. He licked sweat from his upper lip. It was funny, but now as he tried to remember that morning, the whole thing seemed more like a dream than like a real experience. For a moment, he wondered if he really had been out walking—and how long he had walked, where he had gone, what he had really done or seen. These things were becoming less clear to him. "It's all kind of foggy now," he said.

"You don't remember then what you did?" Dr. Golynska said.

"I—think I do, but—"

"You often have blackouts don't you, Harrison? Didn't you have a blackout that night, too? You remember that you did, don't you?" Dr. Golynska's voice suddenly became almost casual. "Lis-

ten, Harrison, try to relax. Take it easy. Give yourself time to remember. You looked in the window. Now, think very carefully. Don't you recall opening the door, running in, grabbing Mrs. Peaseley? She resisted your advances, then—"

Steve's mind seemed incapable of organized thought. He realized what this Doctor Golynska was saying, but he couldn't seem to respond. There was a soothing quality to the man's voice that was almost reassuring in spite of the words it was speaking. "She was pretty, wasn't she, Mr. Harrison? You were quite excited about her. Tell us the truth!"

He wanted to run, but a terrible kind of helplessness seized him. He didn't know where to run to. He was terrified at the thought of being alone. It was better to stay here, with people, anybody at all. If he talked properly, was friendly and cooperative, maybe he could stay here, and this doctor would help him sleep.

He really couldn't remember. There were a lot of evenings and nights that he couldn't remember. He would have a bad dream and couldn't sleep, and then he would walk in the dark and a lot of those nights he couldn't remember clearly, or at all. As if he were afraid to remember. Afraid of what? Perhaps afraid of just what Dr. Golynska insisted he talk about. He knew he had been outside the Peasely house, looking in the window. Mrs. Peaseley was pretty. He had always loved her, but she had never encouraged him very much —not very much—

"And when she fought you," Dr. Golynska was saying, "something happened, Harrison, and you had to kill—you had to do something—isn't that it, Harrison?"

Harrison tried to speak several times. His head strained back and his eyes sought something in a huge huge birdless bowl of sky.

"You'll feel much better if you tell us about it, Harrison. You can sleep then, sleep in peace. No more nightmares then. Just tell us. You want to sleep peacefully again, and not be afraid, don't you?"

"Yes," Harrison said.

Sheriff Bonley started forward, then stopped. He wanted to say something, but he didn't know what it was he wanted to say. Something was wrong, but there was no way to express what was wrong.

He turned and walked toward the road.

Harrison fell forward, covered his face with his hands. What was he afraid to remember? He didn't know. Maybe he had done it. He knew he was crazy in some way,

everyone knew it since they'd given him a psycho survey from the Army. For all he knew maybe he had done it. If he had done it, it would be good to get all of it out and over with, so he could sleep . . .

Three days after Steve Harrison was executed for the murder of the Peaseleys, Lois Harrison came to see Sheriff Bonley in his bachelor apartment near the courthouse. The cold was intense. It penetrated gloves and coat and galoshes. The colors of a winter sunset surrounded Mrs. Harrison who wore only a thin coat, no hat, no galoshes. The pale green light and also the red glow of the setting sun disappeared behind her as she closed the door.

Her breath smelled of whiskey and her eyes were bloodshot. As she sat down heavily, he heard the jerky crunch of snow that clung to her shoes.

Without looking up, she said dully, "Steve didn't kill the Peaseleys. I did."

Sheriff Bonley's mouth was dry. "What?" he finally said, vaguely.

"I loved Steve," she continued tonelessly. "I really didn't think Steve was sick. I thought he was just pretending, so I'd get tired of him and give him a divorce so he could be free to run off with Clara Peaseley. He beat me sometimes. I thought he and Clara were—well—seeing one another. I don't know now. Maybe it wasn't true."

Sheriff Bonley sat down. His knees felt stiff. He wiped his forehead.

"So I started following Steve when he walked at nights. That night, he knocked on the Peaseley's back door. Clara came out onto the back porch. They whispered. I don't know what about. Clara's husband had been ill, you know, some kind of fever. Afterward, I remembered hearing Steve say that he'd get something for Clara, or for her husband. He was always running little errands for people. Maybe that was all it was. I don't know. At the time, I was just too jealous and I hated them. I hated the Peaseleys for being happy together, too. I don't know. Who knows? Anyway, I ran onto the back porch. Steve ran away. I followed Clara into the kitchen and killed her with a butcher knife. She was small, you know. I did it easily. It was even easier killing Mr. Peaseley. I wouldn't have, but he—weak as he was—he came to the bedroom door and saw what I'd done. Then I dragged them out there to the old well and hid them in it. Two days later, I asked Steve to mow down the weeds out

near the well to help cover it all up."

"Why tell me this now? Steve's dead," Bonley said hoarsely.

"I told Mr. Jameson a week before they killed Steve. But he told me to forget it, not mention it again. He said nobody would believe my confession anyway. He didn't believe it, he said. I was just trying to protect Steve, save his life. I guess I didn't want to believe the whole thing either."

"It doesn't make any difference now, Lois. Steve's dead."

"Oh, it makes a difference," she said listlessly. "Because I don't think I'll be able to live with it now. Do you?"

Bonley couldn't answer.

"Now nobody would believe me," she said. "Would they?"

"No," Bonley said with considerable effort. "Nobody would want to."

He rubbed the back of his sweating neck. "Then what about Hugo Stege? If he could read your mind —if he knew where the bodies—"

"I don't know," she interrupted, "how much of this mind-reading power he has. "I think he believed me. When we were alone, I told him about the bodies buried in the well. I told him I saw them there in a dream, that I had dreamt it."

"You told him?"

She stared into the dead fireplace. "I said I saw it in a dream. I had known about the well, you see, because my grandfather was a dowser and he found the well. I told Stege I had extra sensory perception too, of a sort, and maybe he believed me."

Bonley stared off into space for a moment, then put his hands over his face. The Peaseley murders had been in the New York papers, he thought. Stege could have picked up Harrison as a suspect from the papers, have read a lot about him.

He heard the door close. Mrs. Harrison had left. It was getting colder. A rising wind had cleared the sky and the leafless tops of the elms were touched with reddish light. He sat motionless for a long time, feeling the cold penetrating his bones.

All of them had needed a murderer and would use any means to an end. Jameson had to have a conviction. So it was easy for him to accept Hugo Stege's special power as a fact. Mrs. Harrison, of course, had her personal motives. And Dr. Golynska? He was eager to make a name for himself in a new field of science; he wanted notoriety and prestige as did most other people. But aside from that, Bonley knew Dr. Golynska was sincere, that he worked from what was evidently plenty of valid proof that Stege *did* have special ESP

powers. There was Stege's record in Europe, all of those crimes he had helped the police solve.

And Stege's motives were clear enough. Since the sensational solving of the Peaseley murders, Stege had gained considerable fame. He had been hired by individuals to trace missing persons, and several police departments had sought his services. Fame and financial profit for Stege were assured. Whatever this strange power was, Stege might have it—in some degree. It didn't necessarily make him omniscient. And it didn't mean that he wouldn't use any ordinary practical means at hand to gain his objective. Even though he had ESP power, he might really have believed that Mrs. Harrison had seen the buried bodies in a dream. He might really have believed—or convinced himself—that he had found the murderer by extra sensory perception.

But nobody knew what ESP was. No one knew how it worked. How many other times had Stege really failed—*and not known he had failed?* How many other innocent men had been convicted on the testimony of special mental sleuths like Hugo Stege? But how, in a particular instance, could you know if the dictates of ESP should be followed? How could anyone ever know? Even Hugo Stege could hardly be sure. Undoubtedly, the special power was as mysterious to Stege as it was to everyone else, including Dr. Golynska.

So you couldn't really put the blame anywhere, Bonley thought.

"My God!" he said aloud. His fingers shook as he poured himself a double shot of whiskey and gulped it down. "Why, we lynched poor Steve. We lynched him as surely as if we'd put a rope around his neck."

Sheriff Bonley poured another drink, and he was still sitting there when the sun had vanished completely and the room was filled with dusk.

You ought to be sure when it comes to killing a man, he kept thinking. You ought to know for sure . . .

One beanie does not a college make. You also have to have a football team—a winning one, preferably. The college of our story, being inordinately progressive, also has murder on its curriculum.

THAT YEAR'S VICTIM

by Jack Ritchie

"We would like to murder you," Freddie Thompson said.

I hadn't expected the honor and I was flattered. However I went through the motions of resisting. "I really don't know whether I can spare the time."

"It won't take but a few moments of your time, Professor."

Professor Harding and I had been engaged in a game of chess when Freddie had knocked at the door of my rooms on faculty row. He represented the committee appointed to arrange the murder.

Harding lit his pipe. "What weapon do you intend using on Professor Ranier?"

"Most of us would have preferred to cut his throat," Freddie said. "But then we remembered that a knife was used to dispose of

Professor Elbert last year and we don't like to be repetitious. We finally decided that a revolver would do nicely."

"And just when am I going to be murdered, Freddie?" I asked.

Freddie wore heavy glasses and his penetrating eyes were almost as large as the lenses. "Some time in the near future, Professor. Perhaps tomorrow, perhaps the next day. We prefer the actual moment to come as a surprise to you. We feel that if you knew in advance, you might be tempted to—shall we say —ham it up?"

"I would do no such thing," I said stiffly.

"Nevertheless," Freddie said, and he smiled thinly, "we prefer that it come as a surprise."

Every year the senior law class at our university stages a mock murder and a mock trial. The murder is usually committed in the presence of as many startled and unsuspecting witnesses as possible—the principle of that being to show the law students, through the trial, that the testimony of eye witnesses is often more than unreliable.

Last year, for instance, Professor Elbert was "stabbed" as classes were changing in the Physical Education building.

The assailant—as usual, it seems —made his physical escape, but was later "arrested" and brought to trial. The incident was witnessed by twenty-eight students and three faculty members. There were not exactly thirty-one different descriptions of the murderer, but suffice it to say that the defendant was found not guilty.

"Who has been selected to murder me?"

Freddie smiled again. "We haven't made a final decision. But there are any number of volunteers."

"Shall I carry a plastic bag of tomato juice and crush it to my chest when I am shot?"

"No. We've decided that that will not be necessary this year."

I thought I saw why. When Professor Elbert had expired in his tomato juice gore, the baton twirling team had been in the corridor on the way to the gymnasium. Seven of the girls had fainted. And so had Tanker Flanagan, our star fullback.

I smiled. "Then I will have to resort to sheer acting."

"We think that everything will come quite naturally," Freddie said. He looked at Harding. "No one but the committee and the victim must know. You will keep this a secret?"

"I won't breathe a word," Harding said.

When Freddie was gone, Harding and I returned to our game.

Harding pondered his king's side attack. "Freddie Thompson? He's one of the most brilliant students this university has ever had, isn't he?"

I nodded. "Almost a straight A student."

"Almost?"

"Yes. Through pre-law and law, he's received only one B."

"Really? Who gave it to him?"

"I did."

Harding moved his knight. "A pity to spoil his record." He tapped the ashes from his pipe. "They'll have to shoot you in the body, of course. Not the head."

"Why?"

"There are some types of blanks which expel a cardboard wad with considerable force. The chest would be the safest place to aim the gun."

"They will undoubtedly use a blank which does not expel a wad."

Harding was doubtful. "I don't think so. You see, they want that genuine expression of surprise on your face when the gun is fired. The impact of the wad should do it."

Somehow the idea of being impacted by a wad made me faintly uneasy. I moved my rook and immediately regretted it.

Harding took a pivotal pawn. "Who else is on the murder committee this year, do you know?"

I could remember only one other student at the moment. "Roy Wickens."

"Tall fellow? Had to put in an extra semester because he failed one of his courses?"

"He couldn't seem to grasp real estate law. I was forced to give him the grade I did."

"You're rather harsh with your marks, aren't you, Alfred?"

"I do not believe in coddling students. After all, this *is* a university, not a nursery school."

Harding won that game and the next. He almost never wins two in the same evening, but my mind seemed to wander at times.

At ten-thirty, we quit and I saw him to the door.

He adjusted his muffler. "You know, Alfred, I've heard it said that the safest place to commit murder is in Grand Central Station during the rush hour. I imagine a crowded college campus might be a good second choice."

After he left, I read for awhile and then went to bed.

. . . I was descending the steps of the library. It was a beautiful, crisp, sunny day. Down below me at least a hundred students were gathered in sundry small groups—the girls busy at their primary mo-

tive for attending a university, to get a husband.

And suddenly a wild-haired youth wearing glasses dashed up the steps toward me. There was a snarl on his lips and mania in his eyes. He pointed a tremendous revolver directly at my chest.

There was a blinding flash! . . .

I sat up in bed, waiting for the pounding of my heart to become inaudible. After a minute or two, I forced a smile. The sub-conscious has a perfidious imagination.

It was perhaps three before I dozed off again. This time I dreamed of a well-attended burial in which I was the principal attraction.

I returned hastily to the conscious and switched on the lights. It was only four in the morning, but the kind of sleep I was getting was not designed to rejuvenate tired tissues.

I put on my robe and went into the study. I sat down to read, but inevitably found myself at the stack of student papers I would have to grade and return by Friday.

James Branner's theme elicited a sigh. How had he survived college English, much less become an exalted senior in law school? He clearly deserved a C, and even that was charity, in my opinion.

I went on to the next paper, but my thoughts remained with Branner. Wasn't he on the murder committee too?

Branner was a large boy, huge actually. And hadn't he once been placed on university probation, for an entire semester, for participating in one of those homecoming riots?

There was no telling what an unstable personality like that might do next. I crossed out the C and gave him a B.

I worked until seven-thirty and then went out to breakfast. I arrived at the law building twenty minutes before my first class and went to the faculty lounge.

Professor Lasson, reading a newspaper in a high-backed easy chair, was the only other person in the room.

I nodded, took a seat at the opposite end of the room, and lit my pipe.

Ever since I quashed his attempt to make one of his books a required text, Professor Lasson and I have nothing but cold nods for each other.

If he had succeeded in introducing that miserable volume into a university with the prestige that ours has, ninety percent of the law schools in the country would undoubtedly have followed suit.

The financial loss to him was, of course, considerable. As a consequence, the expression Lasson reserved for me was quite as hostile as that on the face of a druggist, when you purchase nothing but a four cent stamp.

But this time Lasson spoke. "How do you like being this year's murder victim?"

I frowned. "I was always under the impression that the identity of the victim was a secret to all but the murder committee."

The tips of his sharp teeth showed. "A secret to other people, perhaps, but not to me."

"Why not?"

"Because I am the custodian of the gun."

Perhaps it was the lighting of the room, but I had the impression that his eyes were slowly acquiring a malignant quality.

"Naturally, we cannot allow students to carry or possess weapons on the campus," Lasson said. "And so I have possession of the gun—until such a time as it is needed."

A thought touched my mind. Did it have to be a student? To commit the murder? I quickly corrected that. To commit the *mock* murder?

I remembered that in 1957, Professor Jacobson had been bashed on the head by Assistant-Professor Mable Watkins while he was lecturing his class on marriage law. The severity of her blow had generally been attributed to nervousness, but I also remember that two weeks previously Jacobson had broken their six year engagement. He took sick leave for a week.

Lasson reached into his pocket and brought out a revolver.

I closed my eyes.

"This is the weapon," he said.

I opened my eyes again. And I thought, did they have to choose such a large gun?

"A Magnum .38," Lasson said. "One shot will ruin the engine block of a car."

Why should that be of interest to anyone?

He reached into his pocket again. "These are the blanks."

I was gratified to see that the cartridges had no noses.

His hand went into the opposite pocket. "And these are the real thing. Beauties, aren't they?"

That depended on one's taste. "The ones people use to ruin engine blocks?" I asked.

He nodded. "Naturally we wouldn't want to get them mixed up with the blanks."

I was the last one prepared to debate that. "If you aren't aware of it," I said stiffly, "you are pointing that revolver at me."

He chuckled. "It isn't loaded."

I perspired slightly. Suppose he actually wanted to . . .

But that was ridiculous. Just because his miserable book was rejected . . .

My wits returned. The basis of this whole thing—this murder—this *mock* murder—was that there had to be a great many witnesses.

As long as we were alone, I was perfectly safe.

Lasson put the revolver and the cartridges back into his pockets. All except one of the authentic ones. He studied it thoughtfully. "I wonder," he said, "if a bullet-proof vest could stop one of these."

I decided it was time for me to go to my first class.

As usual, Freddie Thompson occupied one of the front seats—ever alert and prepared for any question. Roy Wickens was near the windows. He came to the university daily, only for this one make-up class.

James Branner, his brow low enough to suggest the Neanderthal rather than the Cro-Magnon, doodled in his notebook with the stub of a pencil. He seemed to be brooding.

And Emmeline Grogan.

Why is it necessary for women students to feel that their education is a failure, unless they become infatuated with one of their instructors?

The course and degree of her adoration had followed the usual seating pattern. At the beginning of the semester, she had found the last row quite comfortable. But as the weeks passed, she had gradually worked her way nearer to me.

When she achieved the front row, I had been forced to tell her that I was much too old for her and besides I had made a deathbed vow to eternal celibacy.

The love of my youth, Lucinda, a fragile creature, sensitive and doomed by the fates, gradually wasted away with something resembling consumption, and left me alone to face the world—overcome by grief, but looking forward to joining her at some future date.

It is a tragic story—and wholly untrue—but it has protected me for many years. It is usually enough to send the eager ones away misty-eyed and pondering deliciously on the unutterable cruelty of life.

But I'm not sure how Emmeline took it.

She was still in the front row.

At the nine-twenty bell, I cut off my lecture and the students departed.

But not Emmeline.

She regarded me with what appeared to be over-powering sympathy. "There's no use brooding

about Lucinda, Professor. Life goes on."

I sighed. "Not for me. I merely exist."

Was there a tear in her eye?

"You really miss her, don't you?"

My smile betrayed the maturity of suffering. "More than I can say. But every hour brings me closer to her. My existence in this world is nothing. I court danger."

She touched my arm gently. "Perhaps you will see her soon. Sooner than you think."

She wiped the tear from her eye and left the room.

Now what had she meant by that? Perhaps you will see her soon. Sooner than you think.

A thought came to me.

She was also a member of the murder committee.

Did she know something?

I had no other class until ten-thirty, so I went to the library to do research on the paper I was writing for the Law Review.

At ten-twenty, I returned my reference volumes to the desk and left the building. I stood for a moment at the top of the steps.

It was a beautiful, crisp, sunny day. Down below me at least a hundred students were gathered in sundry small groups—the girls busy at their primary motive for attending . . .

I felt ill.

Freddie Thompson was pouring over a notebook, but he looked up. Was that thin smile a greeting?

The brooding James Branner was there—brooding—and so was stilt-like Roy Wickens of the make-up class. And Professor Lasson. Were his eyes narrowed in glorious anticipation of something?

And Emmeline Grogan, who for mercy's sake might—

I fled back into the library.

I mopped my brow and went to the window.

Yes, they were all waiting. I knew that as surely as I stood there cowering.

How could one man have so many enemies? Perhaps I had been a bit too caustic in my relations with others. Perhaps my courses had been a little too stiff. Perhaps the world needed bad lawyers as well as good ones. Perhaps I should long ago have buried that story about Lucinda. But what is a man to do? He must live; he must be himself. And when the time comes . . .

I straightened. A man must be a man. He must be honest with himself; he must hew to his path —to the very last moment.

I walked to the desk and spoke to Miss Hendricks, the librarian. "Do you have a sheet of paper and an envelope, please?"

She got them for me and I went to a table. I addressed the envelope to the president of the university.

I dated the blank sheet of paper and began writing.

Dear Sir:

On the desk in my study you will find a theme by one James Branner, a student. I have given him the grade of B. That is an error. It should be a C.

Yours inflexibly,

Alfred Ranier

It was my last testament, but one must not leave things undone.

I took the sealed envelope back to the desk. "Please put a stamp on this and mail it when you can." I felt impelled to add, "Miss Hendricks, you conduct one of the finest and quietest libraries in the country."

And then I walked to the large front doors.

I paused only a moment, straightened my shoulders, and stepped outside.

It was a beautiful, crisp, sunny day. Down below me . . .

But I had been through all that twice before.

I walked slowly down the steps, my head high.

He stepped quickly from a group of students. He raised the .38 Magnum which could devastate an automobile.

I stared at him.

Professor Harding!

But what had I ever done . . .

The muzzle of the gun flashed and I felt the blow at my chest.

Everything went black.

I came to as they were carrying me into the library. I felt the distinct inclination to moan, but I suppressed it. I would die like a gentleman.

They put me tenderly on a couch.

"You can open your eyes now, Professor Ranier." It was the voice of Emmeline Grogan. "It's all over."

I opened my eyes.

"You were superb," Freddie Thompson said. "I've never seen anything more natural."

I looked down at my chest. There was no blood.

Freddie looked a little concerned. "Are you all right, Professor Ranier?"

I sat up slowly and unbuttoned my coat. There was no hole in the shirt either and my heart was beating. I could hear it. Unquestionably I was alive and functioning. I gave thanks that I'd made it.

"I knew we didn't make a mistake when we picked you," Freddie said. "You're our favorite professor."

My nose and forehead wrin-

kled, in puzzlement and wonder.

Freddie nodded. "Some of the other professors gave me A's simply because they didn't want to spoil my record. But you gave me a B when I deserved it. I admire your integrity and courage, sir. You taught me humility."

Naturally, we had to shake hands. Freddie expected it.

The brooding James Branner smiled. "You give me C's. Everybody else gives me C-minus."

The tall Roy Wickens had something to say, too. "I needed the extra six months here. I couldn't have passed the State Bar exams anyway."

Emmeline Grogan patted my shoulder. "Professor, have you ever investigated spiritualism? I mean the seance? I have an aunt who's positively psychic and tingling with empathy. She might be able to get you in touch with Lucinda. You're my favorite professor, too, and I don't like to see anybody suffer. Like dogs or people."

I was still feeling relief and gratitude for the turn of events, when Professor Harding entered the library through the rear door. He beamed. "Everybody was so stunned that I hadn't the slightest difficulty in making my escape. Some of the students recognized me, of course, and so we'll have the trial. But I have the feeling that if I'd disguised myself just a little bit, I could have gotten away with an actual murder."

It was then that I noticed Professor Lasson. He leaned against a bookcase, his right hand in his suitcoat pocket—the one in which the genuine cartridges reposed.

His eyes glowed as he studied me and a faint reproachful smile played on his lips. I had a terribly strong feeling that what Harding had said had given him an idea.

And the room grew colder.

The murder could occur at any time, I realized suddenly. Any time at all.

But perhaps it too would take place on a beautiful, crisp, sunny day.

And down below me at least a hundred students would be gathered . . .

by Glenn Andrews

MURDER, MURDER INCOMPLETE

LOCATED in the East Sixties, the psychiatrist's office had a new, freshly-waxed, opulent look. Even this irritated Harry Sturdevant. Perhaps in the back of his mind was the idea that a confessional should be austere, though he had determined ahead of time not to tell Dr. Sanson the truth.

"How old were you when this happened?" Dr. Sanson asked.

"I'd just had my sixteenth birthday the day before. That's why we took the swim. Kind of a celebration."

"And how old was the boy that drowned?"

Sturdevant squirmed uncomfortably. The chair beside the doctor's desk, on which he sat,

Nostalgia, I would have you know, is derived from the Greek. "Nostos" means a return to home. And "Algia," I assume, is the name of a young woman who makes returning home worth-while. Trouble, an old Anglo-Saxon word, inevitably follows.

was hard and straight-backed—the only Spartan piece of furniture in the office. "In a couple more days," he said, "Fred would have graduated from high school. He was eighteen, I believe. But I don't get it. What's our ages got to do with what I came to see you about?"

"You're impatient," Dr. Sanson said. "And—and understandably so. Here." Dr. Sanson extended an opened roll of red-colored Lifesavers across the desk towards Sturdevant. "Here. Have one."

Sturdevant shook his head emphatically.

"Go on, take the whole roll, put it in your pocket."

"What's this, a test or something?" Sturdevant complained. "I told you I don't want any. What's that make me—untractable? Uncooperative? I'll be frank with you, Doctor, all this casualness—it—it annoys me."

Dr. Sanson nodded profoundly.

"What I need is help. This thing's driving me bats. Why, suddenly, should I start thinking of Fred? Good God, it's been over twenty years."

"This image of Fred is extremely vivid, I take it."

"Vivid? It's sharp. Right in focus. Like a—"

"And it's always the same?"

"Yeah. Yeah. Always."

"Now just what is it that you see? Try to be as exact as you can. And I'd like all the details, everything."

Sturdevant squirmed on the straight chair; this time, because he was about to give the doctor his prepared, lying answer. He was a big man—huge jowly face, emotionless gray eyes—and looked the part of a tough executive down to an executive's uniform of conservative, expensive clothes.

"I told you I was sixteen when this happened," he began. "Just a kid. So seeing my best friend dead would naturally scare the daylights out of me."

"Naturally," Dr. Sanson said.

"What comes to mind now is just his dead face. It's not gruesome, not gruesome at all. Just pale, eyes closed, peaceful looking, like a person in a coffin. But the thing is this, I react to it now, the

way I did when I was a kid and that's what makes it hard to take. You understand?"

Though Harry Sturdevant was gravely somber as he spoke, he felt an inner amusement. He saw the doctor nodding, his lips pursed diagnostically. His hands were fiddling with the roll of Lifesavers. Sturdevant had discounted that belief that everything you told your doctor was held in strictest confidence; some things were simply too risky to reveal. And he rationalized that if the doctor could do something for him, he could do it without knowing everything.

"And just when do you see it?" the doctor asked. "Any particular time?"

"Morning, night. When I'm eating. Sometimes it wakes me out of a sound sleep. And when I don't see it, I'm thinking about Fred. That's about as bad."

Sturdevant squirmed, and not being able to find a soft spot on the hard chair, he stood up. He paced for a moment, then went over to a lounge against a side wall. As he dropped into it, he said sardonically, "All right if I sit here?"

The doctor nodded, absently, absorbed by his thoughts.

Relaxing in the new found comfort of the lounge, suddenly all Sturdevant could see was Fred's face—everything else was blanked out of his consciousness. The face's expression had the comic aspect of a boy who was splashing around in water in an attempt to keep from going down. Cheeks blown out, nose wrinkled, eyes squinting. It was exactly the way Fred had looked twenty-two years ago, when he'd come up that one time, the way he'd looked just before Sturdevant pushed him down again and held him down until Fred had drowned.

"What? What did you say?" Sturdevant had the feeling the doctor had been talking to him, and in the same instant rejected the idea of telling him that he had just seen Fred again, for the image had been so real—as it always was —that, at the moment, he didn't feel he could lie about it convincingly.

"Did you feel responsible for your friend's death?" the doctor asked.

"Well, I remember telling my dad that if I hadn't gone along with Fred's idea of skipping school that afternoon, he might not have gone swimming. Then it wouldn't have happened. And my dad told me if I was going to reason like that, I ought to blame the weather for Fred's drowning. You see, it was a record hot day for the beginning of June that year."

"You and your father were close?"

"Why? What're you doing, psychoanalyzing me?"

Doctor Sanson smiled. Then he asked: "You do consider yourself quite successful, don't you?"

"My income tax is quite a big lump every year."

"But there is also success or failure in personal relationships, and you know that—"

"Look, look," Sturdevant said angrily, "I know you have to ask all these questions. But I might as well tell you right now I don't expect to go through years of this kind of thing, you and me sitting here batting the breeze. There's this one thing that's bothering me. I want to get rid of it. Just that. I'm not asking for psychoanalysis, a whole personality revamping. Going back to my father, and all that stuff. I'm okay. It's just—"

"There are still questions that I must ask you. This disturbance of yours requires—"

"All right. Go ahead. Ask." Sturdevant arose and started pacing. "I'm not kicking about that."

"Do you have friends, Mr. Sturdevant?"

"Friends?"

"You gave me the impression that you think of success in only the monetary sense."

"Of course I've got friends—a lot of them, and good ones."

"Are you interested in a woman?"

Sturdevant started to sputter. He suddenly had the disquieting feeling the doctor knew about Irene, who was haunting him as much as the dying, comic-tragic face of Fred Langhorn.

"You obviously aren't a success in that category," Doctor Sanson continued, "for you're in your late thirties and you're as yet unmarried."

Sturdevant grabbed the straight backed chair, gripped its uprights as though he were going to use the chair as a weapon. "You're out to make me sore. You are, aren't you? What is this, some—new treatment?"

Dr. Sanson shook his head, a gentle smile on his face.

"Well, what's this about women? There's no connection—" Sturdevant broke off. Then he quickly added, "None. None." If it hadn't been for Irene, he thought, and his having a crush on her and her going steady with Fred, he'd never have drowned Fred and if he hadn't drowned him, he wouldn't be here . . .

"It appears you do see a connection," Dr. Sanson said.

In awe, solemnly, Sturdevant let go of the chair and moved back. It were as though the doctor

had again read his mind, as though he knew all about Fred and Irene and about the murder.

The doctor stood up, and by that time Sturdevant had already decided the doctor knew nothing, and that a person who was on edge, as he was, might very well imagine things.

"You're obviously keyed up to a point," Doctor Sanson was saying, "so that you imagine things that—"

This time Sturdevant stood motionless. It was uncanny—frightening—the way this man was snatching thoughts right out of his head.

"I'm finding myself another doctor," Sturdevant said with the incisive speed of dismissal. "I don't like being insulted. Maybe some of your patients go for that kind of treatment, but not me."

And as he spoke he moved clockwise, then counterclockwise in a frenetic search for his hat. While aware that he was behaving like a person in desperate straits, he also realized that control was beyond him. Again the thought he'd had that morning, that he was heading for a breakdown, occurred to him. And though he was consciously aware of all this, when the doctor calmly took the hat from his desk and calmly extended it, Sturdevant snatched it viciously from his hand.

"I suggest a long rest," Doctor Sanson said, as if this rudeness hadn't occurred and he were quietly accompanying a patient to the door. "And a complete change. You should go away for awhile. And I can't really begin to explain this disturbance of yours, because I strongly suspect you've kept things from me."

Harry Sturdevant didn't have the doctor's advice in mind when he stormed out of a board meeting deadlocked over an inconsequential matter involving seniority of the directorate, packed an attaché case, and caught a plane heading west.

And during the trip, that seemed endless, he felt like a man hopelessly driven. The confines of the plane irked him. He tried to read, sleep, become interested in the passengers around him. But all he could do was think about himself and that he had lost all semblance of poise and control. You're trapped, so you rushed around madly hoping you'd accidentally discover an exit. It wasn't a case of a criminal returning out of morbid curiosity to the scene of the crime. It wasn't his hometown he wanted to see; it was Irene he had to see. That he had no clearcut reason for wanting to see her—merely a compulsive, obsessive urge—bothered

him. Far from being rational, this trip bordered on the ridiculous. That fiasco-of-a-visit to the psychiatrist, he felt, had made a thousand times more sense.

He must have dozed off, because he was turned on his side, his face to the window, and he seemed to have awakened. And there in his mind was the whole answer, as if it had effortlessly been worked out in his sleep. Why he was going to Fayette. Why he had to see Irene. The solution that he had wanted from Dr. Sanson and from the tortured backtrackings of his thought.

Sturdevant remained on his side, his face to the window. The clouds moved by the wings of the plane with the languor and grace of tranquillity—a suitable backdrop for his just awakened state. When you kill someone, Sturdevant thought, you kill for a reason. In his case, he hadn't gotten that for which he had killed. He hadn't had the courage to take the prize—Irene. To his thinking, when he was as young as he was then, that would have completed the murder. By avoiding Irene, even when in her grief she had turned with affection to him, and by losing all contact with her, he had in a sense denied the very existence of the murder. It had been as simple, as ingenious as that. And now it wasn't that his conscience bothered him over his having committed the murder, but that it had been done for nothing. After all these years, it was high time he completed the murder, take what he had killed for, and give his conscience some rest.

In his absence, so it seemed, the town had shrunk. Fayette's streets were shorter, its buildings smaller. None of the town seemed real, remembered, but not real.

The Hotel Landmark, with its facade of glazed white brick, had substance because it was new—and therefore new to the town and therefore unremembered.

While he was registering, Sturdevant said to the clerk, "I'm looking for someone. Irene Matson. Years back, she lived on Elberone Drive." The clerk was too young. It was idiotic to have asked him. "This was a long time ago."

The clerk shook his head, as he continued to think very hard.

"You got a phone book?" Sturdevant asked.

"There's a phone booth right over there, sir. You'll find a book there."

Sturdevant had his attaché case sent up to his room, then went to

the booth. There wasn't a single Matson listed. He thought of going to the house Irene had lived in on Elberone Drive, but that didn't make sense if she were no longer living there. It didn't make any more sense than those painful visits he'd made to the house as an adolescent, when he'd gone by it at night and looked up at its lighted windows just because it was the house in which Irene lived.

Then, in spite of himself, he was outside the hotel and following the directions of memory that would take him to that house on Elberone Drive.

"Harry Sturdevant!"

The man who'd called his name was making his way through pedestrians on the sidewalk to get to him, his hand extended. He grabbed Sturdevant's hand. "Harry Sturdevant," he said again, savoring the name, expressing both delight and disbelief.

Sturdevant let his hand be shaken endlessly as he tried to place the man.

"You don't remember me, do you, Harry?" the man said. "I can see you don't. Remember that English teacher at Fayette High? Hair piled up high on top of her head."

"Yes," Sturdevant said, nodding, still trying to take weight and years off the man, reducing him to an approximation of what he'd looked like as a boy. "Yes," he said again as he studied the heavily lined, liver-splotched face.

"Miss Krander. Remember her? With that hair-do of hers, how could you forget her? Way out, that hair-do. Took you back to the Nineties. Well, how've you been, Harry?"

And before Sturdevant knew it he was being steered into a bar, not completely against his will, for this voluble nuisance, he had decided, might be able to tell him how to get in touch with Irene.

The bartender brought their drinks and the man still hadn't told Sturdevant who he was; he insisted, to the obnoxious point, that Sturdevant guess. Sturdevant made a few stabs.

"Sat right across the room from you in Miss Krander's class. Vergil . . ."

"Vergil," Sturdevant repeated thoughtfully, idly stirring the ice cubes in his glass.

"Vergil Thompson. You *don't* remember me."

"Oh, yeah," Sturdevant said, lying. "Vergil, yeah, yeah."

"Well, I remember you, buddy boy. How've the years been? They treatin' you right? Don't give me no argument; this drink's on me." He slapped a five dollar bill onto the bar. "For auld lang syne. Yeah,

you sure take me back. Of course you haven't forgotten Freddy—Freddy, Freddy . . . Now what the—"

"Langhorn."

"Langhorn, that's right. You would be able to give it to me just like that. I'll never forget the day he drowned, because, you know, it was on that day my kid brother got his first pair of long trousers. Serge blue, they were, kind they take out in the daylight to see if they'll blind you or not. And my brother was so damn happy about those things. And yet, I want to tell you, I didn't feel quite right about the whole thing. Here that kid was dead; they were going to put him in the ground, and there my brother was kicking up his heels over a pair of pants."

"I'm looking for Irene," Sturdevant said, looking straight down into his drink that rested on the bar. "Irene Matson."

"Freddy's girl? Sure I remember her. Some beaut. I remember her. Sure. Sure . . ."

Sturdevant straightened up and finished off his drink, and the instant he did Vergil Thompson shot his hand up for the bartender "I got to see Irene," Harry said. "She still around, you know?"

"Well, that's something I can't tell you. You see, Harry, I'm working out of Dayton. Been for some time. Cash registers. I'm in domestic sales. Always have been. Couple of years, it'll be fifteen I been with Universal. They been treatin' me—"

"You wouldn't know then if Irene Matson's still around?"

"Freddy Langhorn's girl?" Thompson shook his head. "I don't hit Fayette very often. That's why I got such a bang out of running into you. That must have been a blow to her, her boyfriend drowning that way. Off and on, I wondered who she married, just whatever happened to her. A thing like that—"

"I don't like to interrupt," the bartender said to Sturdevant. "And I don't want you to think I was eavesdropping, you understand. But if it's important for you to get in touch with Irene Matson, she's Mrs. Wallace now, and she lives out in Charlton Heights."

"Good boy," Vergil Thompson said to the bartender.

"She's at 1515 Everett Lane," the bartender added. "I can jot it down for you. You want me to?"

"Don't bother." Sturdevant shook his head. "Thanks. Everett Lane. Fifteen, fifteen. I got it." And he was thinking Irene must be a steady customer and something of a lush, for the bartender to have memorized her home address, information needed for the

occasions she had to be shipped home.

Then, at Vergil Thompson's verbose insistence, Sturdevant had another double Scotch. He hadn't eaten and he was aware that the liquor he'd already consumed had started to do a job on him, but still he needed more, for facing Irene—now that he was so close—seemed both overpowering necessity and ordeal.

The cab went over the old Bailey Street Bridge, that Sturdevant noticed was still old, and then cut through the West End. The glow from his drinks continued to get brighter. His thoughts thanked the cab, for not going by the tiny grocery store his father had run, and that was no more than a shack in size and quality and of which as a kid he had always been ashamed. "Dr. Sanson," he said in his thoughts, "no, my childhood wasn't exactly a happy one. Matter of fact, I was something of an unhappy bully at times." Then he went on to wonder about his present unhappiness, why his work and getting to that top rung suddenly seemed pointless, and the return to the scene of his youth had become all-important. Still Fred wasn't pounding away in his thoughts now, which was a relief. And he wondered what Irene was going to be like after all these years, wondered if—like most childhood sweethearts revisited—she would prove a terrible letdown . . .

"One, five, one, five," the cabby said. "You want I should pull up the drive?"

The question made sense; the house—palatial, though of simple, contemporary lines—was fronted by what appeared an acre of sloping lawn.

Sturdevant walked. Because of the drinks, the black-top-driveway lacked solidity. He began to consider what his approach to Irene should be, deciding it was impossible to figure out anything definite ahead of time. He would have to play it by ear.

That a Chinese houseboy, in white jacket and little black bow tie, should answer the door didn't surprise him.

With more smiles and bowings than words, Sturdevant was led into the living room and to a chair. Sturdevant stood. He marveled at the place, the glass walls, the cantilevered slabs of oak that constituted a stairway, the cathedral ceiling with its big, black-metal mobile, highlighted with dabs of blood-red. Nothing traditional or small town about the place. Fayette never had had anything like this

when he was a kid. The whole Charlton Heights section, for that matter, was new and very rich. And how all this wealth had affected Irene and would influence their future relationship, he just didn't know.

And then Harry Sturdevant felt himself tighten up, for Irene was coming toward him. Her quizzical expression, he saw, was blended with a half-smile. She wore a simple black dress, pearls at her throat. She was clearly the same individual, and yet her maturity tended to deny this. As a young girl, her black hair had hung, thick as a mane, down her back, but now it was very short, very chic. God, she was beautiful. And before she reached him, she stopped to put down a glass beside a martini pitcher that was half full.

"Sing-Ling didn't tell me your name," she said.

"I didn't think giving it to him would be necessary."

Irene stopped, was silent for a long moment. "You were right," she finally said. "It wasn't." She stood quite a distance from him. She stood, letting her smile grow. Her posture, everything about her, was saying, "This is too good to be true." Then she moved quickly toward him and embraced him, saying, "Harry, Harry . . ."

"I was in town," he heard himself explain inanely, "and I thought I'd look you up."

"Oh, isn't this wonderful?" She moved quickly from him. "We must have a drink. Two drinks."

"Why not?" And Sturdevant was again aware of the half full martini pitcher. It didn't seem possible that a crowd of visitors could have just been there.

"How long has it been, Harry?" Irene was saying, carefully carrying a full glass to him. "Don't tell me." She laughed. "I don't want to hear."

Because the glass had been filled to the very brim, she brought it to his lips for him to sip. The act and her closeness and his being just the least bit drunk impelled Sturdevant to touch her hair.

The glass was so full, she couldn't avoid his affectionate gesture. "Oh, Harry," she said. "I know I'm repeating myself, but it is good to see you." And with this, she turned the glass over to him and moved away, stopping at a coffee table for a cigarette.

As Sturdevant stood watching her, a strange anger grew inside him. He'd never married and it was because of her. He'd killed Fred because of her. Though she had turned to him at the time and he had run away, he still blamed her. And he envied and hated whoever this Wallace person was—

for his obvious wealth and because he had Irene.

"I'll have to go," he said, impulsively, out of anger.

"Oh, no." Irene put down the drink, she had just been in the act of picking up, and came quickly to him. "You've just come. You must stay and have a few drinks. I just happened to think of what the F. H. S. Year Book said. It said," and she spoke as though she were reciting, " 'Harry Sturdevant, sure to go far, and it won't be in a rented car.' Well, well, was it right?"

"How'd you remember that?" Sturdevant said.

"After all, Harry, you and Fred and I—"

"Year, yeah, I know," Sturdevant said, "we were pals. But it was always really just you and Fred. I haven't forgotten." The liquor was making him sound sorry for himself. "How'd I ever go on being Fred's best friend? And after he died, being a substitute for him, being second best, no sir, that wasn't for me."

Walking about as he talked, was how he happened to come upon the picture, in the heavy silver frame, a wedding picture, Irene made taller than life by an overflow of tulle. And the man in the picture . . .

"Remember him?"

Irene stood beside him—her scented nearness, tangible, obtrusive.

"He's familiar," Sturdevant said. The man was short and stocky, with ears ludicrously faced forward. "I just can't—"

"When he was going to Fayette High, his name wasn't Wallace; it was Waddelle. He'd had it changed, legally and everything. Oh, this was some time before we were married. My husband's a very sensitive person. And he was certain Waddelle sounded too much like the way he walked. You remember him. You must. Charlie. Charlie Waddelle."

Suddenly Sturdevant knew; knew, but couldn't believe it. "You can't mean old Castiron. That's what we all called him—Castiron."

"Kids. How can they be so cruel? No wonder Charlie has this obsession about names."

"You married him?" Sturdevant's incredulity had intensified. "Castiron?"

"He's not a monster. You make it sound—"

"You know why we called him Castiron. He was all left hands, had lead in his pants. Choosing up sides, he was always the last one to be picked. Backstop, away back, that was good old Castiron's position. I just can't believe it . . ."

Irene stubbed out her cigarette,

appeared to be trying to force it through the ash tray. She went to her drink and finished it off.

Sturdevant moved closer to her. "You're not happy with old Castiron, are you?"

"Charlie," Irene said. "His name's Charlie."

"Ahhh. But he's still Castiron. People don't change. Homely. A guy who's all left hands. Hardly think him the romantic type, somebody married to a beautiful woman—" He seized both her arms. "Why'd you marry him, *him?* When I came in and saw you dressed in black, I thought, 'She's in mourning.' It was like Fred had drowned yesterday and you were in mourning. And you are in mourning. You actually are. And it's because of him, old Castiron . . ."

She started to cry and he drew her to him, and she spoke, as she cried, with her face to his chest. Fred, she said, had died and Harry had left town and she had felt utterly wretched and alone. So when Charlie came along, she was drawn to his need rather than to him. It wasn't love; it was just that he had aroused a need in her to make a noble, dramatic sacrifice. And Charlie had never been sure of her, his feelings of unworthiness had driven him to achieving the presidency of the biggest plastic model kit company in the country.

"And he still doesn't rate you," Sturdevant said. "What's more he never will."

She turned from him, turned her back on him.

"And you know it. And your drinking isn't going to change things. No matter how much you lap up."

She drew herself up very straight and walked away from him. "You make it sound," she said, "like I'm a drunk."

"Maybe you are. If you're not, Mrs. Wallace, you're sure on your way." And then he went quickly to her. "I didn't mean that," he said. "Honestly, I didn't. You're lovely, honey, lovely . . ."

She shook her head. "You meant it. And it's true, what you said is true."

He tried to kiss her then, but she broke free of him, her beautiful dark eyes wide with wild, uncontrollable fright. "You have to go, Harry." She moved frantically about, her hands worrying the pearls at her throat. "At once. You must—go."

Sturdevant stood motionless, an island in the midst of all her erratic movements.

Irene came to him and pleaded with him. "Charley's insanely jealous. I'm afraid of him. If he knew

you were here, there's no telling—"

"Just—take it easy."

"But you're in danger."

"I'll talk to him. There's no reason why you and I can't pick up where we left off—way back."

"Please, please go."

"Okay. But you're going with me."

"No!"

"What is it," he flung at her, "are you in love with Castiron?"

"I don't have to answer that. You know the answer."

"Then you're not in love with me. Is that it?"

"Please go, Harry. I beg of you to go."

He grabbed her by the arm and swung her roughly around. "You didn't answer my question. Answer me!"

"All right! I'm not in love with anyone, but my beautiful, drunken self—and—and the memory of Fred and—"

He forced his lips on hers, as she pushed him off, kicking and striking out at him.

"You prefer Castiron to me? Do you? That it?"

"Go! He'll kill you, Harry, if he finds you here. You don't know how insanely jealous Charlie is. Just a few months ago, he attacked someone because he thought—"

"Is that his big attraction? That he'll kill for you? Well, I killed someone for you. *Fred. Your dear Fred. My best friend.* And I didn't do it so you'd go and marry Castiron of all people, and regret it and be miserable because of it."

"Please go. Why say such an awful thing?"

"I held his head under water. You don't believe me, do you?"

"Believe you?" she said tonelessly, as though in shock.

"I held his head down, held it down until I didn't have to any more. Don't you see that you have to leave with me, so what I did will have meant something, so it won't bother the life out of me?"

"Oh, my God." Irene's eyes were closed. "Oh, my God."

Sturdevant strode across the room, his intention to get a drink, but in the state he was in he'd actually walked away from what he wanted. As he turned, he saw the man come in. Charles Waddelle had entered from the garage and already had his coat off as he walked into the living room from the dining area. He looked as he did in the framed wedding picture, but though he'd gained weight, he'd lost hair and this made his ears even more ludicrous.

Waddelle didn't see Harry Sturdevant, but he saw the martini pitcher and he saw Irene. He shook his head, his lips tightly

pressed, as one might in controlling a surge of displeasure, and he didn't say a word. Irene stood silently looking at him, and it was as though they weren't on speaking terms.

With obvious anger, Waddelle snatched up a newspaper and started up the stairs. Something caused him to turn, perhaps he had decided to reprimand his wife, perhaps he'd caught a glimpse of Sturdevant at the far side of the living room. When he turned, it seemed that the height and angle of his position not only brought Sturdevant into view, but into focus.

Waddelle turned slowly and came slowly back down the stairs, and now he spoke with an affability that was obviously and openly insidious.

"Company, Irene?" he said as he walked towards her. "I didn't know you had company." He dropped the newspaper on the coffee table. "Won't you introduce me?"

"Of course." Irene held desperately to her pearls. "Oh, sure." She turned to Harry Sturdevant, and for a long, terrible moment it appeared she didn't know exactly what an introduction required. "Charlie, this is Mr. Wellington."

"Mr. Wellington, huh?" Charlie said.

"He wants to sell us a set of encyclopedias."

"Really. Hmm. And now the question is, do we want them."

"Look, Irene—" Sturdevant began.

Waddelle interrupted him before he could go on. "I'm very pleased to know you, Wellington." But he made no move to shake his hand. "So you sell encyclopedias?"

"No, I don't," Sturdevant said, with angry emphasis.

"Knowledge," Waddelle said, "is considered indispensable these days. Important to be up on as many things as possible. Now there must be information in your encyclopedia on judo, a science I've mastered in the last few years. Should have taken it up much earlier. As you no doubt know, judo allows a weak man to use a strong opponent's weight and strength in defeating him."

"Mr. Wellington was just going," Irene said.

"Well, I'm glad you offered him a drink. I see you two have been drinking."

Sturdevant said, "I'll run along," but the instant he moved, Waddelle moved with the speed needed to block his way. "What is this?" Sturdevant complained. "Will you get out of my way, Castiron? I've had enough of you playing cat and mouse."

"Castiron," Waddelle said reminiscently, "been sometime since I heard that. You were the one made it up, you know. And I've always wanted to thank you, *Harry Sturdevant.*"

"What're you blaming me now," Sturdevant said, "for what I did as a kid?"

"So you're the one Irene's been seeing lately. I was damn sure she was seeing someone. I suppose she told you I'm the jealous type; that I imagine things. But apparently, this time, Sturdevant, I haven't been subject to flights of fancy. Here you are, her old boy friend, big as life."

"Charlie!" Sturdevant heard Irene scream. "Charlie . . .!"

And then he felt the sharp pain in his thigh that made him bend far forward at the waist. But he didn't feel the paralyzing, chopping, edge-of-the-hand blow across the back of his neck. When his awareness returned, he was on the floor, Castiron astride him, Castiron choking him.

Near the termination of the intense pain—the awful struggle for a gasp of air, for life—was a thought, strangely, almost idly considered: Technically, there was a relationship between strangulation and drowning; both resulted in asphyxia. And Harry also thought that now his face must be blown out as Fred's had been that sunny June day long ago, his lips pale blue as Fred's were just before going down, down, down, eternally down . . .

And then, as in a dream, it occurred to Sturdevant that there was more than one way to complete a murder. He'd considered the whole thing only from his strictly personal point of view. In a sense, you completed a murder by taking that for which you had killed. But there was also an impersonal, automatic, inevitable completion . . . retribution. By its ethic, the murder of Fred could be complete only when the one who had killed Fred was in turn killed.

And then Harry Sturdevant's thoughts became jumbled and weak and ran into nothingness.

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BID: ONE MURDER

by C. B. Gilford

THE STAGE was set for murder. Simon Troy checked his properties. The bridge table and four comfortable chairs. The two decks of cards, one red and one blue, lying ready on the table, and alongside them the score pad and pencil. He patted the side pocket of his sports jacket. Yes, most important of all, the third deck, also red —the stacked deck—was there. His lucky jacket too, by the way, the jacket he'd worn when he'd won all his big tournaments. And the gun was in the bedroom, but available.

He mixed himself a drink, but not a very strong one. A mild stimulant always sharpened his wits, and he had to be at his best tonight. There mustn't be any slip-ups. But he knew he would

Planning an ad lib murder requires endless rehearsing. And please examine all details meticulously. A can opener, I would say, makes an ideal weapon; it strikes such an unpremeditated note. And don't, whatever you do, pick the first victim to come along. Interview as many candidates for the role as you possibly can.

be calm. It was one of the qualities which had made him the world champion.

Thora came into the living room before he'd quite finished his drink. She was wearing a tight black dress. She was proud of her figure, of course, and liked to stroll away from the table once in awhile. Just another of her disconcerting, annoying habits.

"Drink, Thora?" he asked.

Her cool green eyes regarded him scornfully. "You know, darling, I never drink when I'm playing."

"But this will be just a friendly game."

"There's no such thing as a friendly game."

He smiled understandingly. Thora was amazing in her way, and though he was a shrewd judge of character, she had fooled him completely. He had already become the world's most famous bridge expert when, at thirty-seven, he met Thora. She'd been twenty-four, and strikingly beautiful. But she'd never played bridge in her life. That had suited him. He detested female bridge players. She had married him, he was sure, partly because he was rich and famous. Then he'd made the mistake of teaching her the game. She'd caught on quickly, became his partner in little games at home. Then when his usual partner had been taken ill just before a tournament, she demanded to be allowed to play with him. Well, they'd won the tournament, and after that she'd been unbearable. Here he was now, forty years old, had been at the game since he was a child prodigy of six. Thora was only twenty-seven, with a mere three years' experience. And people had begun to say she was the better player!

He watched her as she moved about the room, tidying things for the arrival of their guests. She was a creature of elegance, from the blonde coils atop her exquisite head down to her slim nyloned legs and her tiny feet in those ridiculous spike-heeled shoes. Yes. confound it, he was jealous!

No, he reminded himself, she really wasn't the better bridge player. She merely confused her male opponents, took their minds off the game. Women she defeated by making them envious and angry, robbing them of poise and self-assurance.

"Thora," he said, "you should learn to relax a little more at the bridge table."

The green eyes regarded him with amused superiority. "Don't try to tell me how to play bridge," she answered.

The Golders were half an hour

late. By the time they arrived, Simon and Thora were not speaking, except in the most coldly polite and formal way. The Golders, attuned to any emotional displays of opponents, noticed this situation instantly. In fact, Simon observed Darwin Golder winking at his wife Hazel. They're overjoyed, he thought; they imagine that if we're angry with each other, it gives them an advantage in the game.

"Looks like we're set up for a little bridge," Darwin said gleefully.

He was a bald, rotund little man with thick glasses, deceptively affable and mild. He was ranked among the twenty or so top players in the country, and thus was no easy adversary. His wife Hazel, built along the same lines, though with hair and without glasses, was almost as skillful as her husband. And she thoroughly hated Thora, Simon remembered. Which would make her a sympathetic witness when the time came.

"I thought we might get around to a small contest before the evening is over," Simon admitted.

Meanwhile, he offered drinks to his guests. Warily, they succumbed to one apiece, small ones, they insisted. He saw to their wants, then went into the bedroom and returned with the revolver.

"Good heavens," Hazel Golder said when she saw it.

Darwin was a little nervous, too. "I knew you specialized in highway robbery, old boy," he said with a shaky laugh, "but I didn't know you'd actually started using a gun."

"This has nothing to do with bridge," Simon assured them. "Just wanted to show it to you. I bought it a couple of weeks ago. I'm quite fond of it. We've had trouble with burglars, you know. And my wife's been acquiring more and more luxurious tastes. She's been spending her tournament winnings. There are more jewelry and furs around this place every day. Thought it might be a good idea to have a little protection."

The Golders hadn't missed his sly reference to Thora's extravagance, nor Thora's defiant glare at her husband in return. But Simon's explanation hadn't reassured Darwin. "You wouldn't actually shoot that thing, would you?" he asked.

"Probably not," Simon said. He laid the weapon on the mantelpiece, within easy reach of the bridge table, making it seem as if he were merely too lazy to return it to the bedroom. "Well, how about that little game?"

The prospect of bridge took the Golders' minds off the gun. Every-

one converged around the table and managed to sit down eventually, the Golders versus the Troys. After the initial cut, Simon maneuvered the two decks of cards so that he would always be dealing the red deck. An atmosphere of seriousness and cold intensity settled over the table. These were four professionals. Thora had been right. Among professionals there could be no such thing as a friendly game, despite the fact there were no prizes involved.

From the very first the cards favored the Golders, and they were three thousand points ahead in less than an hour. This streak of ill luck put Thora into a foul mood, not interfering with her skill, but causing her to become a bit talkative, mostly in Simon's direction. During the third rubber, to help things along, he made a deliberate error which allowed the Golders to succeed with an over-ambitious bid. Thora could contain herself no longer.

"Why didn't you lead me back a club?" she almost shouted at him.

He let himself show some bitterness, too. "I was playing a hunch," he flung at her.

"Why don't you forget your hunches, Mr. Troy, and stick to your famous system?"

"My dear, only an imbecile follows the strict rules all the time. The advanced player relies to some extent on his instincts."

"Don't flaunt your experience at me, Simon Troy."

"Yes, I know, my dear; yours is very limited. Your playing, Thora, still leaves a little something to be desired, if you don't mind my saying so."

The direct insult was too much for Thora. She rose and stalked away from the table. Now was the time, he knew. He could feel the blood rushing into his face. "Sit down!" he shouted at his wife's back.

The Golders, now a little alarmed, fidgeted nervously in their chairs. "Maybe we ought to continue this game some other time," Darwin suggested softly.

"We'll continue it right here and now," Simon answered. "One thing my wife apparently hasn't learned is self-control. One doesn't stop in the middle of a game just because things aren't right. Thora, I said for you to sit down." He paused a moment. Now came a key play. "And while you're at it, straighten your stocking seams."

Few things could have distracted the Golders' attention more simply and thoroughly. For different reasons, both the Golders ogled Thora's legs, and Thora's own attention was drawn to them also.

Simon had all of ten or fifteen

seconds, more than ample time. It was his own deal with the red deck, and Darwin had already cut. Simon swept the old deck off the table and into one pocket, simultaneously replacing it with the new deck, the stacked deck.

"The seams look all right to me," Darwin volunteered.

"Take his word for it," Hazel said. "He's an expert."

This small digression made it possible for Thora to return to the table without its seeming that she did so in response to her husband's command. Simon was anxious now to resume playing, and dealt the cards immediately. No one had noticed the switch of the decks.

Simon had planned this hand with extreme care and all the skill and experience of his profession. He knew exactly how the Golders played, and of course he knew his wife's methods. And the cards were arranged so that the sequence of play—granted four expert players at the table—could proceed in only one direction.

Darwin Golder, despite his partner's denial, got the bid in spades, and Hazel laid down a dummy hand containing no spades. Darwin frowned in disappointment. This was going to be a tough one.

Simon was at Darwin's left, and he made the correct lead, initiating the pattern. A tension settled over the table, compounded partly of the ill feeling between the Troys and partly of the excitement over the contest itself. There was no conversation, only the rhythmic fall of the plastic cards on the hard surface of the table.

Darwin trumped one round. Now was his only chance to upset Simon's plan. He could make the wrong lead now, and everybody around the table would know what only Simon knew. But a better line of play beckoned, and Darwin took it. The cards flipped out one by one. The tricks were taken in—seven in all. Simon had taken the last trick, and now the lead was his again.

He sucked in his breath, tried to control the slight trembling in his body. This was the final moment, the moment both of decision and triumph. Biting his lower lip nervously, he led the ace of hearts, from a suit that hadn't been played before.

Dummy followed with a low heart. Then it was Thora's turn. But before she played she looked at Simon, and her smile was wicked, full of hate. With a sigh of ecstatic joy, she trumped her partner's ace.

Simon leaped from his chair, sputtering with rage, partly real and partly assumed. He slammed his cards down on the table and

emitted a curse, a nicely turned phrase he'd chosen well ahead of time. Thora leaped up too, and her answer was no less eloquent.

The revolver on the mantelpiece was just two steps away. Simon Troy took those two steps. His right hand grasped the weapon, his finger curled around the trigger, he aimed the barrel straight at Thora's heart. Thora screamed, but the scream was drowned out by the thunderous noise of the explosion.

It had been a well-aimed shot. Thora slumped quietly to the rug, where she made a most elegant corpse.

"Don't touch anything," Darwin Golder had cautioned in the utter silence that had followed Thora's death. It had taken him some three or four minutes to manage to say anything.

"That's right," Hazel agreed. "The police ought to see how she trumped Simon's ace."

Good old Hazel. She'd testify for him all right, coloring everything in his favor. And he was quite content to let the police actually see the nature of the insult Thora had flung at him—the deadliest insult of all to any bridge player.

Darwin made the necessary phone call, and Simon poured himself another drink, feeling he deserved it. Then he sat on the sofa and considered the import of what he had done.

The decision to murder Thora had been an easy one. Divorce, separation, any solution of that sort had been out of the question. They were both top-notch professional bridge players, and there were dozens of meets and tournaments every year. Their paths would be bound to cross frequently. And they'd cross swords, too. Because if they were no longer man and wife, they'd be opponents, not partners.

There had been the real rub. For all his pride, Simon was a realist. The devastating suspicion had been growing in his mind for several months—Thora had been developing into the better player! The notion of meeting Thora in bridge battle, being defeated by Thora, being goaded about it by Thora, was all too painful even to imagine.

Besides, he hated her. Purely and simply he hated her. No mere divorce or separation could assuage the hurt he'd suffered at her hands. He had reached the point where nothing less than killing her would satisfy him.

Only the question of method had remained. He'd concocted several complicated schemes, none of

which seemed suitable precisely because they were too complicated. Then he'd investigated the general field, trying to determine how other wife-murderers had fared. And he'd come to the sobering conclusion that whenever a married woman was murdered, the husband was always the prime suspect. Therefore any scheme had to be foolproof. And suppose it wasn't? Then he would have to pay with his own life, in prison or at the hands of an executioner, for the privilege of murdering Thora. Judged from the odds, it had seemed rather a stupid gamble. Committing first-degree murder was rather like bidding a grand slam with a couple of aces out against you.

Simon Troy had made his reputation not as a fancy gambler, but rather as a coldly reasoning conservative with a brilliant capacity for measuring probabilities. One took an enormous risk with first-degree murder. But what about an arrangement that would still get the job of killing done without the big risk?

Would he, for instance, accept a maximum of a ten-year sentence with maybe three years off for good behavior? Seven years of his own life for all of Thora's? Now there was a much safer, surer bet.

So the problem had been merely one of planning a deliberate murder that wouldn't look deliberate. That would appear instead to be a crime of sudden passion, understandable, almost excusable. A crime to which he'd confess humbly, then throw himself on the mercy of the court, weeping his sorrow and remorse. Seven years at most, he'd figured. Maybe less if the judge happened to be a bridge player.

There'd been the possibility of some side profits too. Killing Thora at the bridge table would be especially delectable. He could destroy Thora's reputation, reveal her to the bridge world as the sort of player who would let personal feelings interfere with proper play. It might, in fact, deliver a crippling blow to the whole idea of letting females into big-time bridge. As for his own career—well, it might very well be enhanced by the fact that he'd felt strongly enough about the game to commit murder over it, that he'd dealt out just revenge to a perfidious partner. In prison, he'd finally have time to write that book. And he just happened to know too that the warden was an avid bridge fan. Why, he'd probably be spending every evening of those seven years at the warden's house. And all this not even counting the distinct possibility that the governor, also a

bridge player, just might grant him a full pardon after a year or so.

So he'd finally stacked a deck and arranged things so that Thora would trump his ace. And now he sat, superbly confident, awaiting the arrival of the police.

They came finally in the persons of two uniformed officers and a tousled, nondescript lieutenant of homicide named Winslow.

Winslow proved to be really admirable. He was in his forties, fairly intelligent, and admitted to a knowledge of bridge. He grasped the situation immediately.

"Trumped your ace, huh, and then you shot her?" He whistled softly.

Simon told his story of the events leading up to the tragedy, and the Golders corroborated it. Simon and Thora, both professionals, had taken the game very seriously. There'd been an argument. Both had become rather emotional. Thora's trumping of the ace had been a deliberate insult, tantamount to slapping her husband's face, only a thousand times worse.

Lieutenant Winslow kept nodding as he listened, and stood surveying the card table where the evidence lay. There were the seven tricks in neat piles, the three abandoned hands face down, Darwin's, Simon's and Thora's, and Hazel's face-up dummy hand. And in the middle of the table, Simon's ace of hearts, Hazel's small heart, and that black, damning spade of Thora's.

"Were you folks playing for money?" Winslow wondered. "Big stakes?"

"No, the stakes were not monetary," Darwin explained. "But as you may or may not know, the Troys were——are—well, one was and one still is—possibly the two top bridge players in the world. My wife and I are a bit lower in the rankings. So it was a matter of pride, you see. I for one understand Simon's motives completely. His wife was trying to humiliate him."

"Yes," Hazel added. "Thora was terribly jealous of Simon. After all, he's been the king for quite awhile, and Thora was nothing but an upstart. She was fairly pretty, you know, and she was trying to get by on her looks."

Bless them, Simon thought, bless them both.

Winslow kept on nodding, and then had one of his crew take a picture of the bridge set-up, showing the trumped ace. Surreptitiously, Simon put a hand into his pocket and felt the other red deck. He wasn't worried actually. The Lieutenant had no reason to go around searching people.

"Well, I guess that about wraps

it up," the Lieutenant remarked.

Simon sighed with relief.

Then the Lieutenant relaxed and became even friendly. "Mr. Troy," he said, "I hate to do this, but you realize I'm going to have to take you in."

"Of course," Simon answered.

"The reason I hate to is that I'm a fan of yours. I've studied your system, and I really don't think I'm a bad player myself."

Uneasily, Simon rose from his chair.

"This will be a famous bridge hand, Mr. Troy. The hand you were playing when you killed your wife. You know, I'd like to jot down the details, which player was holding which cards . . ."

Simon made a desperate leap toward the table. Winslow didn't know what his intention was, but he reacted instinctively. He wrestled with Simon till a couple of uniformed cops took over. Then the Lieutenant had a look at the cards. *At the face-down cards.*

When he finished, he looked reproachfully at Simon Troy. "Your hand had no spades in it," he said. "There were twelve cards, six in each of the other hidden hands, that you couldn't see. And surely you kept count of trumps, and you knew there were still twelve out. So you must have known the other two hands had nothing but trumps. You knew—and you were the only one who could have known—that Mrs. Troy *had* to trump your ace."

Simon wanted to cry. He'd hoped the judge would be a bridge fan. He'd known the warden was one, and the governor also. It simply had never occurred to him that the detective might be. Stupid oversight. Cops were probably a lot like firemen, sitting around most of the day playing cards. But bridge?

"Funny thing, Mr. Troy," the Lieutenant said. "I never got interested in the game till I started reading your column."

To be a salty character is not easy. It is a simple matter to be obnoxious, but you must also be loveable. And should you be senile, consider yourself fortunate. And, finally, being able to solve crimes in ten seconds flat is sine qua non.

Walk A Fine Line

by Paul Peters

SOME magazine or other—a quite prominent one, I think—runs a series of sketches entitled, "The Most Interesting Friend I Ever Had," or "The Finest Character I Ever Chanced To Meet," or something like that. The exact title isn't important though, because you get the idea. In fact, you've probably read one or more of these articles if you were ever plagued with a bad tooth and had to sit for any time in a dentist's waiting room.

Anyhow, I've read quite a few of them myself and I always end up feeling sorry for the authors be-

cause the people they write about are so colorless and ordinary and flat-chestedly dull—

In comparison with my Uncle Greeley.

Of course my Uncle Greeley passed on quite some years ago, but that doesn't make any difference. In fact, I've noticed that most people get more interesting after they're dead. Maybe that's because the folks who tell about them, using a few whoppers, have less chance of being tripped up. Then too, listeners are more polite about granting admirable traits and characteristics to the dead, don't you think?

But that isn't important here because I don't have to tell any whoppers about my Uncle Greeley. It isn't necessary, so you don't have to be uneasy while you read this. Every word is Gospel truth.

I guess what made my Uncle Greeley great was his being just a little better than everybody else in every way. He was better physically, better mentally, better morally, and—Well, what else is there?

One of the smartest, Uncle Greeley. Like the time he led the successful escape out of an escape-proof Confederate prison. That was during the Civil War of course —I told you he died a good while ago—and he was in this prison in Tennessee called "Little Yuma" I think, or some name like that.

I've never found any record of this particular prison in any Civil War histories, but there could be a reason for that. This prison was so bad, it could be the South was ashamed of it and thus neglected to mention it to the historians.

Anyhow, this prison did exist and my Uncle Greeley was in it because during one of the battles—I don't recall which one—his rifle jammed and then something went wrong with his pistol and he'd just broken his sword on a rock, so eleven Confederates were able to jump on him and take him prisoner after one of them threw sand in his eyes first.

Anyhow, he was in there along with other loyal Nebraska boys—six to a cave. That's what this prison was, a lot of caves in a hillside and what made it escape-proof was the guard system. There were steel doors in front, a great big bluff behind, and a bunch of alert Confederate guards who took their jobs as a trust and weren't about to let anybody out.

But my Uncle Greeley got himself and his five Nebraska buddies out all right and he did it this way: As soon as they were assigned to their particular cave, he said, "All right, boys. We'll start right now and begin to dig."

So I guess while the prisoners

from other states were lolling around in *their* caves waiting for the war to get finished, Uncle Greeley and his *Nebraska* boys were digging like mad.

It wouldn't have done them any good, though, if it hadn't been for my Uncle Greeley's sharp mind. It came into play when they'd just finished digging their tunnel and were so close to the wall of the bluff they could hear the Confederate guard's boots just outside.

Right there, my Uncle Greeley made them stop. They were amazed and said, "For Pete's sake, why? We've dug eight days running. Now let's get out of this mole hole."

But my Uncle Greeley said no and made them go back to their cave and dig eight days running in the other direction.

When they had that tunnel a foot or so from the bluff face, he stopped again and took them back to the cave and that night they staged an escape through the first tunnel.

But my Uncle Greeley, who was leading the escape, pushed through into the moonlight and yelled, "Land o' Goshen, boys, we made it!"

Of course, they hadn't made it at all. His yell brought guards from as far away as Atlanta, and the guards hauled them all out and whopped them good and threw them back in their cave.

And that was when my Uncle Greeley and his buddies made their escape, made it the next night, through the second tunnel, while the guards—thinking their prisoners were too sore to move a peg—were celebrating the failure of the first escape.

I just tell all this in passing, to give you an idea of how smart my Uncle Greeley was and how he was a born leader of men.

I knew him best in my home town where we both lived, and mainly after the war when he settled down there for good. It was a fine little town in Nebraska called Medford, and everybody was very proud of my Uncle Greeley and he became a leader of men in Medford too. Not through any effort on his part. Just because he was Uncle Greeley, the kind of a man people would trust with their troubles.

It was because of this trait of leadership that he got involved in the Omaha bank robbery along with the private detective who came to Medford, the robbery I was going to tell you about in the first place, before I got sidetracked with the prison thing. So we'll get back to it.

But he would have never got involved with the detective if he

hadn't been the person he was, and to really understand it you have to know a little about his philosophy of life. It was a wonderful philosophy. He and I used to take long walks through the country around Medford and he would tell me:

"Boy, all you have to do is look to nature, live with her, let her be your mother, boy, and she'll never let you down."

And here's some more of how he used to talk to me: "Nature will teach you everything you need to know," he would say. "The sun, the moon, the stars and the earth and the wind, boy. These are her tools and her school books. Live with her and you can't help learning the lessons she teaches. She'll teach you love and loyalty and all the rest of it and you won't have to go to a church to pray because your whole life will be one great big prayer."

He would expound thus, a six-foot-six giant striding across the land while I loped along—four steps to his one—trying to keep up and finding enough breath now and again to gasp out, "That's right, Uncle Greeley. That's just how I've got it figured."

Or once when I banged a bare toe against a stone—I was ten at the time—he whirled and raised a great sausage of a finger and said, "But you got to watch her, boy! You've got to watch her like a hawk. She's cruel in order to be kind. That's one of the things they say about her and it's true. There's a lesson as well as a stubbed toe in every rock."

And when we finally stopped for a moment of blessed rest: "Yes, boy, it's the little things in nature you have to watch. She teaches her biggest lessons with her smallest wonders. And after awhile you realize there is nothing small in the old girl at all. Everything about nature is big."

And with a little spare wind in my lungs, I would say, "That's right, Uncle Greeley. That's about the way I've got it figured out, too . . ."

And that was about how things were when the detective came to Medford. He was a fat little man in a black bowler hat and high button shoes—this was around the turn of the century, mind you, when the Indians had about given up any hope of getting their land back by either treaty or tomahawk, but while the hard-riding gentry of the James ilk were doing pretty well with country banks.

That was what the fat little detective came about—a recent bank robbery in a middling-sized country town called Omaha—and it was logical that after some discreet inquiry, he by-passed the local

sheriff and came straight to my Uncle Greeley.

Uncle Greeley received him in our parlor and let me stay to listen and the detective went right to the point, concluding, finally, with:

". . . And so we have this Luke Brindle, sir. Right here in Medford."

"Out in the country a piece," Uncle Greeley corrected. "Has a little farm out there," he added in his great base rumble. "Fine fellow, Luke. Know him well."

"All the same," the detective said stubbornly. "We know for sure he's the cousin of Freeman Shepley, the thug who got away from Omaha with a sack of greenbacks."

"Possible, possible. After all, we can't pick our relatives,"

"We know too, that Shepley went through this area about a week ago. That was a few days before he was picked up in St. Louis with fifty dollars on his person—about fifty thousand less than he left Omaha with."

"And you think he stopped off to see Luke?"

"It seems logical."

"Not logical, though, that he would leave the money there."

"But why not? He was being pressed."

"Luke would have nothing to do with such a crime," Uncle Greeley said sternly. "Not a fine man like Luke. Known him for years."

"All right. If you say so, I'll grant it, but that wouldn't necessarily stop Shepley from maybe hiding the loot on his cousin's farm or somewhere in the vicinity. A convenient place with a reason to come back to after things cool down."

"I suppose that's possible. Luke is a trusting, openhearted soul. But why did you come to me with this?"

"Because I have to walk with a very light foot until I find the money. The slightest suspicion of why I'm here and it might vanish —"

"If it's here at all," Uncle Greeley said.

"If it's here at all. But if it isn't, there's no harm done and, as I said, secrecy is important. That's why I came to you—a leading citizen you might say—instead of the sheriff. When there's a reward involved the news can leak out and—"

"There is a reward?" Uncle Greeley asked sharply.

"Five thousand. A pretty good one, if I may say so."

Uncle Greeley pondered the problem a few moments, while the detective glanced uneasily in my direction. "I hope the boy won't —"

"Go out and spread it around? Not a chance of that. No more

than I would myself. I'm seeing to a goodly part of his education and he's a responsible lad." I wriggled my red ears in sheer pleasure as Uncle Greeley said that. Then he went on: "I guess we can run out and have a look. As you say, this evil cousin might have buried the money without Luke's knowledge."

"If you help me find the loot," the detective said carefully, "I'll be perfectly willing to assume that . . ."

And so we went out to have a look, the detective a little dubious about the value of my company on the expedition, but making no stand in the face of Uncle Greeley's sponsorship. We went that night, under an overcast sky, with two bull's eye lanterns to light our way. The late hour was at Uncle Greeley's insistence because, as he said: "We can't embarrass Luke by showing up in his presence and associating him with the crime even by implication." Which was all right with the detective. All he wanted was to get his hands on the money.

Luke's place was about five miles out. We weren't halfway there yet, when the clouds broke away and a big yellow Nebraska moon put our two lanterns out of work. It also allowed Uncle Greeley to dampen the detective's optimism by showing him the many places off Luke's farm where the money could have been buried.

"The pockets in that dried-up river bed over there for instance," he said. "Hasn't been any water in it for years. Or somewhere in that mass of rock and sand just ahead. Not more than ten acres, but it would take months to cover it properly."

"I think maybe it's right on this place we're going to," the detective replied. "You're sure Luke Brindle won't be home? I sure wouldn't want to *embarrass* anybody." There was slight sarcasm in this last, but Uncle Greeley overlooked it.

"He won't be there. Luke is a social soul. He spends his evenings with friends."

Which was true. At that exact moment, you could bet Luke was dead drunk with his witless cronies over in a settlement called Lizard Ridge.

Then we rounded a hill and there was his place, an old tumbledown unpainted layout, still and ghostly in the moon light. I shivered deliciously and snuggled close to Uncle Greeley.

"There it is," he said, "Not in very good shape, I'm afraid. Luke has been poorly for some time and you have to keep on top of a farm or it gets on top of you."

This was one of the things Uncle Greeley was teaching me, a tolerance of my fellow man. But while childish cynicism can be modified, for my money Luke Brindle was a drunken, shiftless bum who had been "poorly" since the day he was born and would be dumped in his coffin that way.

We got out of the buggy and headed for Luke's house by way of the out-buildings. Uncle Greeley had lighted his lantern for interior work and we stopped at the root cellar while he pointed a beam in past the half-open door, where it focused on what was left of Luke's potato crop there on the dirt floor.

And the detective surprised us by saying, "I guess this Luke Brindle really *is* poorly. Not even able to sprout his spuds right."

Uncle Greeley said, "Oh, you know farm life, I see," while I peeked in and saw that the detective was right. There were the potatoes in a pile on the floor, their sprouts winding every which way like a tangle of pale four and five-inch snakes. I shivered and drew back.

"That's right," the detective was saying. "I was raised on a farm."

We went on and passed Luke's pigpen and I held my nose, it was so bad, while the detective expressed his disgust. He said, "Not even a clean spot for them to sleep on."

This brought out some more of his farm knowledge. Most city people think pigs are dirty, but that isn't true. A pig is one of the cleanest animals there is, and even in a dirty pen there will be a clean spot for sleeping.

But Luke's pen was so dirty, even the sow had given up.

We checked the barn next, going over it very carefully until we were certain nothing was hidden there and that the floor hadn't been disturbed.

The house finished things off, and it didn't take long to go through it. Luke lived in a three-room hovel that was almost as bad as the barn. An easy place to search, though, and five minutes after we went in we were outside again, Uncle Greeley waving his arm and saying, "There it is. You can see every inch of it from here. Only about six acres and flat as a kitchen table."

The detective's spirit was way down. He'd come out so cocksure he was on the right track, he'd left no margin for disappointment.

"Guess I was wrong," he lamented. "At least, if we didn't hit it here, there's no point in digging up the countryside. That would take years. Let's get back to town."

The detective was so tired he

stayed in Mrs. Carey's boarding house that night, instead of taking the late train. And he came over the next morning to say good-bye to Uncle Greeley.

Uncle Greeley received him in the parlor again and gave him a glass of elderberry, and while he was drinking it and looking very glum, Uncle Greeley said to me, "Just turn that geranium plant away from the window, boy. Reverse it."

I turned the geranium while he explained to the detective. "All living things move toward the sun," he said, "toward the light. Sunlight is the life of growing things. And if you leave a plant by a window without turning it, the whole stalk bends in that direction."

The detective couldn't have cared less.

Uncle Greeley repeated, "All living things turn toward the light." But then he saw he wasn't taking the detective's mind off his troubles and poured him another glass of elderberry.

Then, twenty minutes later, we took him to the train and Uncle Greeley sent him off with a crushing handshake that that man would remember for many a mile. And as we watched old Number Six pull out, Uncle Greeley sighed a big, windy sigh and said, "Well, boy, we played fair with him, didn't we? Played strictly fair."

I wondered what he was talking about while I answered, "We sure did, Uncle Greeley."

"That's a lesson to be remembered, boy. Always play fair. Of course, you aren't expected to do the other fellow's work for him. Just walk the fine line of fair play and the Lord will smile on you through all His works."

I told him I'd certainly remember that and he looked up at the sky. "We must go out and have done with the business. Tonight will be as good a time as any."

So, after dark, with our bull's eye lanterns cleaned and filled, we returned to Luke Brindle's place and stopped off at the root cellar. And while I threw potatoes aside as Uncle Greeley directed, he sat with his back against the wall and a fine briar pipe in his hand and said, "Now if that detective had spent a little time in *our* school, he'd have been a little more curious about the ground under those spuds, wouldn't he, boy?"

I said, "He sure would have, Uncle Greeley," but I didn't ask why because he'd taught me the young shouldn't be mouthy; that they should wait for their elders to speak. So I waited and he said:

"That detective would have known a simple truth—that every

living thing reaches for light; no matter how dumb or blind all life must strive toward the blessed sun."

I heaved potatoes and said, "That's sure Gospel truth, Uncle Greeley."

"That's one of nature's first laws, boy. And we knew it, didn't we? We knew that every one of those sprouts should have been stretched out toward the door, the only source of light in this miserable hole; stretched straight and true, like the arms of infants reaching out toward the great mother."

It dawned that the potatoes had been moved some when the money had been buried. I said, "That's right, Uncle Greeley. Instead of those sprouts being twisted every which way like—like a pit full of snakes."

Uncle Greeley regarded me with approval. "You turn a neat phrase, boy. Maybe that's what you ought to do—give thought in your education toward the language."

"I'd like that."

"You'll have a little money now. That's where the reward money will go. For your education. But you must say nothing about this root cellar. You must say you found the money under a rock by the old river bed. That's a lie, of course, but it's also loyalty. You and I *know* Luke Brindle had nothing to do with this; so we must protect him. It is right and just."

"Will they believe me?"

"I think they will. They are interested mainly in getting their money back. They will have that and they already have the thief and I think they'll be satisfied."

And I guess they were because, after a little stir of publicity and some excitement, the thing died down and no one bothered Luke Brindle.

The reward was paid and was used for my schooling and in those days five thousand dollars could buy a lot of education.

But it never got me nearly as much as Uncle Greeley acquired, without paying a cent, by merely observing—rich in his certainty that the laws of nature are the laws of God . . .

judge jury and hangman

by Donald Martin

ONLY once have I ever had a glimpse into the mind of an old man, and I have never forgotten it. His name was Doctor Robert Temple and he was an old man when I was a boy, when the century turned.

I used to pass Doctor Temple's house every day to see if he was sitting on the porch, for I knew if I saw him there he was sure to wave me on over and that if I sat long enough he would tell me a story. As a young man, he had traveled adventurously through the West, roaming from place to place, from cow town to boom town, as a doctor, administering and diagnosing and healing, and then moving on again, unable to resist, as he put it, "The spirit of the time and the place," which was then to move, always to move.

One day I found him in a pensive mood. I sat on the top step of the porch with my back against the pillar and watched him. For awhile it didn't seem as though he knew I was there. His eyes were misted with the recollection of some other time. His expression was one of deep contemplation, as if he were trying to adjudicate some violent debate that was being conducted inside him. Many old men may be monotonously opinionated and reiterative, but Doctor Temple was not. I realized this day that he was a lonely man and that his loneliness was to a great extent an act of self-exile, because, unlike many old men who believe piously in their own infallibility, Doctor Temple was spending his shaded years sitting in self-judgment, trying to determine the rectitude of something he had done many years ago.

This day, when his eyes finally lifted from their long, brooding

Entertainment in the old West was extremely limited, for there were no westerns on television in those days. So, to pass the time, men engaged in gunfights. This was regarded as a most healthful sport, because there was no earthly way better than walking down the middle of the street, prior to drawing a six-shooter, to get a good tan.

remembering, he chose to tell me of the thing he had done, and the story behind it. This is the way he told it, and the way a boy heard it, many years ago in a slow and quiet time.

It happened during the early days of my travels. I had a small practice going in one of the Kansas cow towns, although I must admit I spent more time sitting around in the hotel lobby and in the casinos, watching the people come and go, than in my office where I belonged; but I had in those years an insatiable appetite to see the many kinds of people that were then moving through the West. And in this town we had as startling a variety of human nature as it was possible to have. There were homesteaders and drummers and gamblers and ex-soldiers and cowboys and drifters. And there were the outlaws, inevitably. Prominent in this latter group was Billy Landle.

I will tell you about Billy Landle. When he walked into a place, you knew his secret immediately: he was a killer. It was written across a face which was the coldest and cruelest I had ever seen. A contemptuous, perpetual leer turned his mouth. His eyes were blue ice, pure evil and unashamed of it. One close look at him and I knew enough to stand clear of Billy Landle. He was up from Texas and carried a bad name with him. His predilection for trouble was always ominously evident, as if he had some sort of eruption inside him which in other men might have been merely whimsy or mischief, but in him rose to malevolence and passion. As was generally the case with this kind of man, instead of trying to keep a rein on his temper, he let it rampage unchecked.

It was only a matter of time before Billy's lack of control got him into some fatal trouble. And that time came one wintry night in one of the casinos. I was standing at the bar chatting with some friends, when suddenly an argument broke out at one of the tables. I turned and when I saw it

was Billy, arguing with a mild-mannered local merchant named Barton, I knew it would lead to something irrevocably bad unless someone got over there. I was particularly concerned because Barton was a good friend of mine and a true gentleman.

Well, I—and others—got there too late. Billy jumped up and in the same swift, fluid motion his six-gun had been snapped out and there was that ugly, banging noise. With one shot (they seldom wasted lead, those that knew how to shoot) he killed Barton, sending him flying back out of his chair. Then Billy got out of there, holding the smoking six-gun in front of him, those eyes colder than I had ever seen them before, his whole body murderously taut and explosive. Not until he had passed through the door did I rush over to Barton. One look and I knew the man was beyond any ministering from this world.

Everyone crowded around the dead man and gaped. (Killings were not as common as certain people would have you believe.) There was a good deal of indignation when it developed that Barton was unarmed. The fact was that he had never even owned a gun.

"What was it about?" someone asked.

"Landle accused him of palming a card."

"Was it true?"

"Of course not! Barton was as straight a man as walked."

"Landle was just out for somebody. You could see it coming."

They milled around, muttering and cursing. You could see their mood blackening, just as surely as if somebody were turning down the lights. Then the marshal shouldered his way through and heard the story, had his look, and left to go after the murderer.

But they were a bit too late. Landle had gone straight from the casino to the livery stable and gotten his horse and rode out of town at top speed. They organized a posse and went after him. But things were against them. For one, Billy had the jump on them; for another, it was night, and for a third, everything was frozen solid and even if they had ridden till sunup they wouldn't have been able to pick up much of a trail.

Billy Landle was never seen again in that part of the country, to the best of my knowledge. I left that town soon after to continue my wanderings. "Doctor Saddle-Tramp," they called me, good-naturedly, in those years, and it fit, I guess. But I couldn't help it. Perhaps I might have stayed in that town a bit longer,

maybe even have settled there permanently, but the memory of my friend Barton's senseless murder was a constant source of pain.

My wanderings took me to many towns during the next few years. I finally settled down in a small mining community in Arizona and established a practice. I was doing rather well there and again might have considered making it my home, until something happened that not only made me leave that town, but which compelled me to leave the West forever.

One day I drove into town in my buckboard and tied up in front of the hotel, where the men were gathered on the veranda. I noticed immediately that something was wrong; there was a certain tension in the air, the men appeared to have evoked this self-conscious quiet upon themselves. Stepping up onto the veranda, I asked what was the matter.

"Gunfight brewing, Doc," I was told.

"Well," I said, "I thought this was a quiet town."

"It is now, but it won't be for long."

"What happened?" I asked.

"A little dispute, a personal matter."

"Between whom?"

"Between Tom Alderman and a stranger by the name of Billy Landle."

It was the first time I'd heard the name in perhaps five years. I had long since ceased thinking of Billy Landle. It was true, I had always expected to run across him again someday, or to hear mention sometime of his own violent demise. But this was the first I had heard of him.

"I think I know him," I said.

"They say he's tough."

The men appeared to be singularly put out by the approaching fight. Tom Alderman was a well-thought-of youth who worked in the general store. As far as I knew, trouble was not his forte, and apparently the other men were aware of this. But it seemed that it was going to be a fair fight and there was no legitimate interference they could make.

"When is this due to take place?" I asked.

"In about a half hour."

"Where is Tom?"

"He's upstairs. But it won't do any good to talk to him, Doc," one of the men told me. "His mind is set. The way he figures it, he has to fight."

I went up to see him. I doubted if it would do any good, but at least I would try to talk to him. I found him sitting next to the window, a glass of whisky in his

hand. He was obviously quite nervous and upset.

"If you're going to fight," I said, "you had better put that whisky away."

"I need it, Doc," he said quite frankly. He was a good-looking youth, not more than twenty. There was no swagger or bravado about him; he was afraid and did not try to disguise it.

"Why are you going to fight?" I asked.

"It's because of a girl," he said simply and with blunt finality. There was to be no dissuading him on that count, I saw. He evidently believed with a strong, almost chivalrous fervor in the justification of what he was to do.

"Do you know who Billy Landle is?" I asked.

"He's no tougher than the average cowpoke who comes in here," Tom said.

"He might be. I know him. I've seen him in this sort of thing, Tom. He's fast and deadly."

"I can handle myself," the boy said. The hand holding the glass was trembling so violently that the whisky was lapping at the rim of the glass. I took the glass from him and set it down. His eyes were hardly able to focus intelligently. Whether it was from the whisky or from his fear, I couldn't quite tell. The color was practically gone from his face. He had an intense, stupefied way about him that spoke very poorly for his immediate future.

"He'll kill you, Tom," I said.

"Then it will have to be," he said.

"No, it doesn't."

To try and talk a youth out of a fight of honor is as hopeless as trying to teach a cactus to square dance. So I went back downstairs. When I stepped out on the porch, there he was, standing across the street in front of the saloon. Billy Landle. Looking much the same as ever. Six-guns slung low around his thighs, the glassy, killer's stare still dead in his eyes, the leer pushing down the corners of his mouth. A little older, a little heavier, with signs of dissipation, but inside still the same, I could tell.

Then Tom came downstairs. The men parted to let him walk through. He went down the porch steps very slowly. Landle stepped into the street and the two of them moved in a slow, rapt semicircle around each other, almost like two men performing on an empty stage. They brought a horrible fascination to it. To my mind, they resembled two men trying to buy with their blood a precious but ludicrous glory. I had resolved that I would not

watch it, but something held me there. It's not something that you turn away from easily; there is something immorally irresistible about two men standing alone in the sun facing each other down.

Tom was trembling visibly. His breath came in gasps, each racking his body like sharp little blows. Then he said he was waiting to hear Landle's apology. It was a heroic, futile gesture on the boy's part. It was as though he was stating his own apologia for all to hear, wanting all to know that he was doing this for a strictly honorable reason. Landle's reply was a short, harsh laugh. I saw then that the man was something less than sober.

Then a few words were spoken and then Landle's six-gun was whipped out. He fired but once. Tom never even drew. He cried out and began to bend slowly toward the ground, clutching himself in frozen agony while Landle remained fixed in a half crouch, one arm swung wide, the six-gun poised in front of him as though someone was going to paint his portrait. Not until Tom had folded over and dropped into the dust did Landle move.

There was an immediate outcry from the men.

"The kid never even drew!"

The men went pouring towards Landle from both sides of the street and he became lost in the mob.

I was the first to reach Tom. He was dead when I turned him over.

"Right through the heart," I said. I knelt there while someone came out with a tablecloth and covered him.

There was swift justice for Billy Landle. They hustled him into the saloon and quickly convened a court of law. Evidence didn't matter: public opinion was against him, and public opinion was always the most powerful instrument of justice in the West in those days. While they were busy convicting Landle, I went about taking care of Tom's funeral arrangements.

The following morning there were two events. First came the hanging of Billy Landle from a tree outside of town. The limbs of the tree stretched out over a rushing river and when Landle had strangled to the satisfaction of the crowd, they cut him off and he plunged like a sack of stones into the water. Then they buried Tom Alderman.

That ended Doctor Temple's narrative. When he had finished, I noticed again the profound in-

trospection in his face, the uncertainty in his eyes. When he began speaking again, he said,

"I have often wondered whether I did right or not."

"About what?" I asked.

He seemed reluctant to answer, as if he had not meant to speak aloud. But then he told me, and so finished the story.

"Well," he said, "the truth was Billy Landle's shot never touched Tom. Landle hadn't been too concerned about Tom and had been drinking all morning and consequently his hand wasn't too steady. Tom died of a heart seizure, brought on by unendurable fright, at the moment he was to draw. But no one ever knew that. I never said anything. My decision was impromptu; I made it almost before I realized it, and then stuck by it, sure that I was right. No one ever questioned it. The way I saw it then, Billy Landle had a debt to pay, an old one, and I was the only man there who knew that. It was I, and not those men, who was judge, jury and hangman that day in that town, and I have wondered often since, as I wonder now, whether it was my decision to make."

Dear Friends,

The continued response to our fan club for Mr. Alfred Hitchcock has been tremendously gratifying to all of us.

Here is some more information about the club. Membership dues are fifty cents, to cover costs and mailing. For this you will receive an 8x10 autographed photo of Mr. Hitchcock, his biography, and a bulletin of current news which will be issued four times a year. Naturally, we would like you to tell as many friends and neighbors of yours about "Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine" as possible, since this is strictly a club for loyal readers. If you want to join, write to me. I do so hope to hear from you soon.

Pat Hitchcock
P.O. Box 434
Tarzana, California

THE TRIAL OF ELMER PICKENS

by William M. Stephens

IT HAD BEEN a nice party and Elmer Pickens hummed a silly tune as he pulled away from the Tip-Top Inn and started down the winding mountain road to Boone City. Priscilla was close beside him and he made a couple of curves a little fast just to feel her sway against him.

"Elmer?" she said. "Do you feel all right? You didn't drink too much, did you?"

He patted her arm. "I'm drunk with happiness, sweetheart. I'm higher'n a bald eagle on Iron Mountain. Know what today is?"

"The fourteenth?"

"It used to be the fourteenth. It's the fifteenth now. And it's just five more days till the twentieth."

"I know," she said softly. "You won't change your mind in the next five days, will you?"

"You bein' funny?" He put an arm around her to draw her close, and the tires squealed as they went around a tight curve.

She pulled away hastily. "Elmer! You better slow down."

He laughed. "All right, Pris. I'll be careful. It's sure a pretty night. Look at the moon shinin' over the

What this country needs is more men who will smoke five cent cigars. Just look what they ostensibly have done for that champion of justice, Rube Claggett. Once again he rides; this time to the rescue of young-love-endangered.

valley. Things look real silvery."

"You look. I'm tired. You don't mind if I doze for awhile, do you?"

"'Course not."

"You're not sleepy, are you? If you are, I'll stay awake and talk to you."

"I'm fine. Go on and get some sleep."

She lay her head back and closed her eyes. From time to time, as he drove, he glanced with tenderness at her face, so young and lovely.

Going around a sharp turn, he saw an object in the middle of the road ahead. There wasn't room to swerve around the object—on the left was a towering wall of limestone and on the right was a sheer drop of a thousand feet—so he jammed hard on the brake. The tires shrieked in agony and he smelled the acrid odor of hot rubber as the car lurched from side to side. There was a sickening bump as one wheel struck the object and slid up and over it. Then the car stopped.

Priscilla was sitting straight up, wide-eyed. "Elmer! What's wrong?"

He pulled the emergency brake and leaped out. The body of a man lay under the car. One glance was enough. He stood up, his face solid white. "No. Stay there, Pris. We hit somebody. He's dead."

"Oh, no!" Her hand flew to her mouth. "Oh, Elmer, no!"

"I think it's the hermit. Old Man Pratt."

Lights flashed momentarily, from a car rounding a turn higher up the mountain. "Move over—quick!" Elmer said. "We've got to get my car out of the road." Spinning the steering wheel to the left, he backed up a few feet, then turned hard to the right as he drove forward. Realizing there wasn't time to maneuver around the body, he gritted his teeth and drove over it.

"Oh, Elmer," the girl cried, feeling the bump.

"He was already dead, Pris."

Elmer pulled to the edge of the road and began flashing his lights off and on. The approaching car came to a gradual stop.

Rube Claggett leaned back in his swivel chair, his big feet propped on the desk and an unlighted cigar in his mouth. His sandy hair was thrown back carelessly on his head, and his eyes, beneath enormous shaggy eyebrows, were closed. When the phone rang he sighed heavily, but didn't shift his position.

In the outer office Almarie Day lifted the phone. "Mr. Claggett's office . . . I'm sorry, Mr. Clag-

gett's in conference. Who's calling, please?" She was silent for awhile, listening, then she said with concern, "Oh, I'm so sorry to hear about it. Why don't you come to the office right away? I'm sure Mr. Claggett will see you . . . Yes, right away."

She hung up and pushed open the door to the private office. Rube didn't move, but one eye opened and observed her owlishly.

"You've got a client," Almarie said. "Priscilla Green."

His other eye popped open and he grunted. "Pete Green's little girl? Why, she's scarce out of pigtails."

"She's old enough to get married. At least she was planning to. Her fiance ran over Amos Pratt last night and killed him."

Rube's big brogans swung slowly to the floor. "Is that a fact?" He shook his head. "Poor old Amos. He was due to get killed some night prowling around the country. I always figured he'd get shot by some farmer for swipin' chickens, though." He swiveled around to a bookcase, removed a pint bottle from behind Volume II of Williams' Code of Tennessee Annotated and took a swallow. "To Amos," he said. "What time's the girl coming in?"

"Right away." Almarie looked at the bottle severely. "Mr. Claggett, some clients—especially ladies—"

He interrupted. "—Don't like a business office smelling like Joe's Bar. You're exactly right, Allie. Matter of fact, you're almost always exactly right." He grinned, wiped his mouth with the sleeve of his coat, and replaced the bottle. "Call Doc Pritchett and tell him the fishing trip's off. I'm tied up."

There was the sound of hesitant footsteps in the reception room. "Come in, come in," Rube's voice boomed. "The door's open."

Almarie stepped into the outer room and said, "Miss Green. Go right in. Mr. Claggett's waiting."

The girl was tiny, with wide, frightened eyes and red hair pulled neatly into a pony tail. A cluster of freckles covered her nose. Her blue dress was freshly starched and her white shoes were spotless. Rube waved her to a chair and she sat stiffly on the edge, her knees close together and her hands clasped tightly in her lap. "I don't know what to do, Mr. Claggett," she began. "Elmer—Elmer Pickens—he's in jail."

He nodded. "Suppose you relax and tell me the whole story."

She took a deep breath. "There's not much to tell. We were coming down Iron Mountain early this morning—we'd been to a dance—and we hit Mr. Pratt with the car. It wasn't Elmer's fault—Mr. Pratt

was lying in the road—but the deputy arrested Elmer anyway."

Rube studied the girl from beneath his shaggy eyebrows. "How fast was Elmer driving?"

She hesitated. "Well, I'm not sure—but it wasn't too fast. He's always a good, careful driver."

"Did you see Pratt in the road—before the car hit him?"

"Elmer did."

"But did you?"

She looked down. "Not exactly. I was sort of dozing. The sound of the tires screeching woke me up and I felt the bump when the car struck him."

Rube squinted. "Anybody else in the car?"

She shook her head. "Just Elmer and me."

He leaned back, closed his eyes and chewed on his cigar. "You say you'd been to a dance. Had Elmer been drinking?"

"Yes, sir, but he wasn't drunk. Elmer doesn't get drunk. He hardly even drinks."

"How many drinks did he have?"

She bit her lip and concentrated. "Five or six bottles of beer, I think —during the whole evening."

He grunted. "I'll be frank with you, young lady. It don't look too good. They'll claim he was drunk, and they'll have the best witness in the world. You."

She gasped and her face grew pale. "Me? Why, they can't. I won't say he was drunk—because he wasn't."

Rube leaned forward and drummed his fingers on the desk. "You were asleep. You can't testify what his condition was—drunk or sober—at the time of the accident. But you *can* testify he had five or six beers earlier. He's got that much against him, and nothing for him."

She struggled to hold back tears. "But they can't make me testify, can they? What if I refuse?"

"You can't refuse, little lady," he said gently. His lower lip jutted out and the swivel chair creaked as he rocked back and forth, squinting at the ceiling. "How much does this boy mean to you?" he asked.

"He means—everything. We planned to be married"—her eyes fell and she blushed—"as soon as we could save up three hundred dollars. Elmer's been working twelve hours a day at the feed store, and I've saved a few dollars every week from my job at the Five and Ten. We counted up yesterday and we needed only twenty dollars more. Next Saturday we'll have it." She paused and wiped her eyes with a handkerchief. "Or we would've. That's why we were celebrating. Now

everything's gone all wrong."

"Answer me one question," he said. "Do you still want to marry this boy, even if he might go to prison?"

"Of course," she sobbed. "I'd marry him today if he wanted me to."

Rube stood up. "Let's go see Elmer. One thing, though," he said, "if I was in jail, and had a pretty little thing like you coming to see me, I'd feel a heap-sight better if you came in smiling, 'stead of looking like a scared rabbit hiding from the dogs."

Her eyes flashed as she drew up straight. "He won't see me crying. I can promise you that."

They walked down a single flight of steps to the street. Across the square, shaded by great oak trees, stood the Boone County courthouse. In the dreary back halls, the county jail was located.

As they reached the curb, a pickup truck came around the corner on two wheels and squealed to a stop. A young man in a sport shirt and white duck trousers jumped out and called, "Hey, Pris!"

Priscilla nodded and moved past him to cross the street with the lawyer.

"Wait," the boy said, catching her arm and turning her around. Then he grinned and said, "My, you're looking pretty." He nodded to Rube, then turned back to the girl. "I heard about Elmer. Too bad. I guess the engagement's off, huh?"

"You can guess again," she said coolly.

He shrugged. "Elmer's going to be out of circulation for a long time."

Rube said, "How do you know so much? You got a crystal ball or something?"

"I wasn't talking to you, dad," said the youth insolently.

"You're not talking to me either, Roderick Haines," said Priscilla. "I'm sorry, Mr. Claggett. Let's go see Elmer."

"Don't be so touchy," grinned Haines. "Tell Elmer I wish him luck. I guess he'll need it. He was pretty high when he left the dance, and everybody knows it."

Priscilla stopped and flushed scarlet. "That's not true and you know it!" she cried. "Why, I—"

"Forget it," said Rube, taking her arm and turning her away. Narrowing his eyes, he stepped toward Haines. "Leave this girl alone, you unmannered pup," he said softly. "And don't be spreading any stories about Elmer Pickens that you can't prove."

Glaring at Rube, the boy backed up to the pickup. "You'll see what I can prove," he said. He opened the door to the truck and climbed

in. "Shyster!" he shouted, as he started the engine and meshed the gears. The tires spun as he pulled away.

Rube's eyes glinted. "It takes all kinds. Friend of yours?"

"Not any more. I used to date him—before Elmer and I started going steady."

"Guess he's jealous," mused Rube. "Can't say as I blame him." They crossed the street and entered the jail.

Sheriff Joe Kemp looked up from a detective magazine and eyed Priscilla with approval. "Howdy, Rube," he said. "Guess you want to see Elmer Pickens."

"You got anybody else in jail?" Rube grinned.

"Not at the moment," Kemp said, "but my deputy's out looking. If business don't pick up, we'll have to go back to raiding stills."

"If you do," said Rube, winking at Priscilla, "you'll never get reelected. The most substantial people in Boone County are moonshiners."

"I know," the sheriff said soberly. "It's a real problem." He shrugged and jerked his thumb toward the stairway. "You can go on up, Rube, but the girl's got to stay down here."

"How come? She's his fiancée. Why can't she see him?"

"The big city jails don't let every Jack or Jill visit the prisoners. The law says I got to let a man's lawyer, or his wife, in. Everybody else stays out."

The phone rang and the sheriff answered it. "County jail. Kemp. Yes, sir!" He listened for awhile, then grinned. "She's here now. I'll take care of it, Ambrose." He hung up and said, "Well, well, business is picking up already. It looks like this young lady's going to get to talk to her boy friend after all. Priscilla Green, I'm arresting you as a material witness."

Priscilla gasped and drew near Rube, who glowered at the sheriff. Rube said, "There no need for this foolishness, Joe, and you know it. She's not going anywhere."

Kemp shrugged. "Attorney-general's orders."

"Ambrose ought to know better. You can't hold her. How much is the bond?"

"No bond. He said to book her without bond."

"That's ridiculous. I'll get a writ of habeas corpus—"

"You won't get nothing done before tomorrow, Rube, and the hearing's then. Why not forget it?"

"It's all right, Mr. Claggett," said Priscilla. She turned to the sheriff. "You say I'll get to talk with Elmer?"

"Sure. I'll put you in the next

cell. You can talk, but you can't see each other."

"All right," she said firmly, "put me in jail."

Rube chewed his cigar thoughtfully. "Might not be a bad idea at that," he said, half to himself. "But remember this, Priscilla. They want to use you to convict Elmer. If they ask you any questions, tell them you won't answer except in the presence of your attorney. Got it?"

She nodded.

"Hey," said the sheriff. "She's a State's witness. How can you represent the State's witness and the defendant, too? Ain't that illegal?"

Rube said, "Priscilla hired me to look after her interests. I don't think there's any conflict of interest between her and Elmer."

While the sheriff filled out the papers booking the girl, Rube went up the steps to where a row of small offices had been converted to cells. Through the barred door of the first cell he saw a slightly built, fair-haired youth reclining on a cot, staring into space. Seeing the lawyer, the boy jumped up, and they shook hands through the bars.

"I got myself in a peck o' trouble," Elmer said.

"Looks like it," Rube agreed. "I've heard a little about this mess, but I'd like to hear your version. Exactly where did the accident happen?"

"Iron Mountain Pike—just below the big S-turn. I come around the last tight curve and there he was, right smack dab in the middle of the road. He wasn't a-walkin', Mr. Claggett, he was *a-layin'*. There wasn't no way to miss him without goin' off the mountain or smackin' in the side." He paused and looked down at his feet. "I sure hate it."

"Could he have fallen down just before you got there?"

"If he did, he knocked hisself out. I didn't see him move. I guess he could've fell down the side of the mountain and hit on the road. He was sure mashed up when I got out and looked at him. I don't think I hit him hard enough for all that."

Rube nodded. "Was he bleeding much?"

"Well, there was a lot of blood around."

"How fast were you driving, Elmer?"

"When I hit him? No more'n five miles an hour. I was almost stopped. I hit my brakes hard and sort of slid over him, easy-like."

"How fast were you going before you saw him?"

"Oh, maybe twenty-five or thirty. You can't go around that S-turn much faster."

"Now, about this drinking. How many beers did you have?"

Elmer frowned. "I been a-sittin' here tryin' to figure. I had two before supper—and about five after. Seven in all, I figure."

"Over how long a period?"

"We got there about nine. From nine till two. Five hours."

"That's a lot of beer," said Rube. "Were you drunk?"

"No, sir. I was feelin' a little good, but I had all my senses."

"Anybody at the dance know how many beers you had? Was anybody sitting with you?"

"No, sir. Just Priscilla."

"Roderick Haines says you were drunk."

Elmer looked puzzled. "I don't know why he'd say a thing like that." He frowned. " 'Less he figures he's still got a chance with Priscilla." His voice was bitter. "Him and that fancy convertible. Thinks all the girls are dyin' to go out with him. Worst part is, most of 'em are. He was by hisself at the dance, though. Tried his derndest to get Priscilla to leave me and ride home with him."

Rube nodded. "Have any trouble with him?"

"No real trouble. He's all talk. I told him to quit askin' Pris for dances or I'd push his nose in. Finally, he left us alone." He looked up at Rube and grinned. "Happens all the time. Some joker's always tryin' to get Priscilla away from me." He paused and his mouth tightened. "I've got to get out of here. You've just got to get me out, Mr. Claggett."

Rube said softly, "You want to marry that girl?"

"I sure do. I been wantin' to marry her since the first time I seen her."

"All right, then, listen here." He talked rapidly in a low tone as they heard footsteps coming up the stairs.

When court opened the next morning, Judge Burnside rapped for order. "What do you have, Mr. Attorney-General?" he asked.

Thin, austere Ambrose Switgall untangled his long legs from beneath the State's table and rose. "This is a preliminary hearing, your honor, on a charge of voluntary manslaughter. Mr. Claggett represents the defendant Elmer Pickens."

The judge nodded. "How does the defendant plead?"

"Not guilty," said Rube.

"All right. Let's have your case, Mr. Switgall."

The attorney-general said, "Thad Foggle, take the stand."

Deputy Sheriff Thad Foggle took the stand and was sworn.

Switgall said, "State your name."

"Thad Love Foggle."

"Now, Mr. Foggle, state whether or not you received a call in regard to a homicide on the morning of the fifteenth. That was yesterday."

"Yes, sir, I did. Some tourists from Indiana called the jail. They come along a few minutes after it happened. The jailer woke me up at about three o'clock and said a man had been killed on the Iron Mountain Pike. I went up there right away and learned that this boy"—nodding at Elmer Pickens—"had run down Amos Pratt."

"We object," said Rube, "and move to strike that last statement as a conclusion of the witness."

The judge nodded. "Just tell what you know for a fact, Mr. Foggle, not what you believe."

"That's what I'm doin', Judge."

The judge said patiently, "Did you see the defendant's car strike the deceased?"

"Why, no, Judge. I was in bed."

"Then don't say it happened. Just tell what you saw and what you did."

The witness scratched his head. "Well, first, I looked at ol' Amos. He was sure dead, all right. Crushed to beat anything. There was skid marks in the road for about thirty-five feet. A little further back—from where the skid marks started—was a pool of blood."

"Where was the defendant's car when you arrived at the scene?"

"It was parked to the side, about twenty feet from the body. The boy and girl, they was just sittin' there in the car. They was all broke up about it—I'll say that much."

"Did either of them make a statement at the time?"

"Yes, sir. The boy admitted he'd hit Amos, but he claimed Amos was layin' in the road."

Ambrose Switgall glanced at the defendant and smiled thinly. "Now, Mr. Foggle, how long have you worked as a deputy sheriff?"

"Oh, ten years, off and on."

"And during that period, approximately how many automobile accidents have you investigated?"

Thad Foggle scratched his head. "Shucks, I didn't keep no records."

"Well, have you investigated many accidents, or just a few?"

"Oh, there's been a mess of 'em."

"Of course there have. Now, in your opinion, based on ten years of experience, and on the conditions found at the scene, do you think Amos Pratt could have been lying flat on the road when he was struck?"

"We object, your honor," said Rube Claggett. "It's an improper question, asking for a conclusion."

"He's an expert witness," said the attorney-general. "His opinion

is certainly worth something."

"That's a matter of opinion," said Rube drily.

Judge Burnside frowned. "I think the witness has been qualified as an expert, Mr. Claggett. Answer the question, Mr. Foggle. Do you think the deceased could have been lying down when struck?"

Foggle said, "No, I sure don't, Judge. Most of the blood was back up the road about forty feet from where the body was layin'. It looked to me like he was hit while he was walkin' and thrown for forty feet or so. Then the car's wheels run over him."

Switgall nodded. "Now, could you tell whether or not the defendant had been drinking?" He glanced at Rube with a slight smile. "I presume the defendant will object to that question, too."

"Not at all," Rube drawled. "That's one thing Thad's an expert on—drinking."

The spectators tittered and the judge hid a smile behind a hand.

Thad Foggle grinned self-consciously. "Yes, sir, he'd been drinkin', all right. He sure had."

"That's all," said the attorney-general with a look of triumph. "Your witness."

Rube Claggett stood up. "Now, Thad, you don't know how much this boy had to drink, do you?"

"No, sir. The girl said—"

"Never mind what the girl said. That's hearsay."

"She's out in the hall. You can ask her."

Rube grinned. "Right now I'm asking you. You're not claiming Elmer Pickens was drunk, are you?"

"No, sir, he wasn't drunk—not when I talked to him. 'Course it'd had time to wear off, or maybe the shock of the accident—"

"Just answer the question, Thad. He wasn't drunk, was he?"

"No, sir."

"And judging from the skid marks, you can't say he was driving too fast, can you?"

The witness thought for a moment. "No, sir, reckon I can't."

"And you can't say he was reckless in any other way?"

". . . No, sir."

"Now, did you examine the defendant's car for dents?"

"Well, I sort of looked around. Didn't see none."

"Did you see any blood on the car?" Rube asked.

"There was plenty on the road. I'm not sure about the car."

"All right," said Rube, "step down."

The attorney-general rose. "Call Priscilla Green."

Priscilla was led in by a bailiff. Taking the witness stand she gave Elmer Pickens a nervous smile.

After she was sworn, Ambrose Switgall said, "What is your name, please?"

"Priscilla Green Pickens," she said.

"Now, Miss Green—" he began, then stopped and frowned. "Pickens? Did you say Pickens?"

"Yes, sir," she said. "Elmer and I got married last night."

Switgall strode purposefully to the sheriff's side and leaned over for a whispered conference. While they talked, the sheriff shook his head vigorously. Switgall stood up and said, "Your honor, this girl has been in custody since yesterday afternoon. She couldn't have gotten married last night."

Rube Claggett rose, waving a paper. "Here's the marriage certificate. For the information of the court, I was best man at the wedding. Justice of the Peace Watkins performed the ceremony from the top of a ladder we propped outside the jail. The defendant and the girl were in adjoining cells."

The judge's lips were compressed to a thin line. "I always knew some of our J.P.'s would do anything for a fee," he said coldly, "but I'm surprised at the lack of security in the jail."

Red-faced, the sheriff said, "We've got plenty of security, Judge. But we're equipped to keep 'em from breaking out. We've never had this kind of problem before."

Rube handed the certificate to the judge. "It's a valid marriage, your honor. I now move the court to instruct this witness not to answer any questions. Under the laws of this state a wife cannot testify against her husband in regard to any matter not arising from the marriage relationship."

"I know the law," the judge snapped as he took the certificate. "I also know that you've stepped out of bounds in engineering this marriage, Mr. Claggett. You're an attorney—an officer of the court. You should be just as concerned with the administration of justice as the attorney-general."

"If the court please," said Rube, "I think I'm more concerned than he is."

"You don't show it," the judge said angrily. "There's a limit to how far you can go in defending a man accused of crime. Mr. Claggett, I'm charging you with contempt of court and unprofessional conduct. You'll have three days to show cause why this matter shouldn't be referred to the Grievance Committee of the Bar Association.

"Now," he said, turning to the attorney-general, "what's the State's contention in this matter?"

"I—we think it's preposterous," Switgall sputtered. "This is a mock

marriage—a trumped-up farce created solely to circumvent the law. I think this girl should be required to testify, your honor." He folded his arms and looked scornfully down his long nose at Rube Claggett. "This isn't a real marriage, your honor. It hasn't even been consummated."

Rube said, with a trace of a smile, "I don't know how Mr. Switgall knows so much about it. He wasn't there. Anyhow, your honor, it makes no difference under the law whether the marriage has been consummated. She's his legal wife and therefore can not testify."

The judge hit the palm of his hand against the desk. "It's a travesty of justice, but this court is going to follow the law." He turned to Priscilla and said coldly, "Step down, young lady. You're free to go if you wish." She nodded and sat down next to Elmer.

"Now, let's get on with it," snapped Judge Burnside. "Does the State have any more witnesses, or did your case depend upon the girl?"

Ambrose Switgall cleared his throat. "May it please the court," he said, "this is only a preliminary hearing. I submit that we've shown probable cause for binding this defendant over to the grand jury. We've established a *prima facie* case. All we need do at this time."

The judge looked at Rube Claggett. "What do you say?"

"I say they haven't established anything, your honor. They've shown that an accident occurred and a man was killed. That's all. They haven't shown that a crime was committed."

"The court agrees, reluctantly," the judge said. "Mr. Switgall, unless you've got more evidence . . ."

"All right," said Switgall irritably. "I'll produce another witness." He whispered to the sheriff, who left the room. "It'll take a few minutes, your honor. We didn't think we'd need this other witness at this hearing."

"All right. We'll adjourn for twenty minutes," said the judge.

Rube leaned over to speak to Elmer Pickens. "At least, we can find out what other cards they're holding. If they'd been able to make Priscilla testify, that would've been the end of it. You'd've been bound over and we wouldn't know what else they might spring at the trial."

Elmer nodded. "I'm sure sorry you got in trouble over helpin' us get married."

Rube chuckled. "It won't amount to anything. It was worth it to see Switgall's face."

"I hope you're right. I sure do thank you for doin' it, anyway."

The judge rapped his gavel and called for order. Roderick Haines came into the room, was sworn and took the witness stand.

"State your name," said Ambrose Switgall.

"Roderick Clayton Haines, Jr."

"Now, Mr. Haines, were you present at the Tip-Top Inn on or about the night of the fourteenth?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see the defendant, Elmer Pickens, there?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was his condition when you saw him?"

"We object," said Rube. "This witness isn't competent to testify about the defendant's condition. He's not a doctor."

"Sustained," said the judge.

Switgall said curtly, "I'll rephrase the question. What was the defendant doing when you saw him?"

"Well, every time I saw him he was finishing up a bottle of beer and ordering another one. He drank at least twelve beers. When he wasn't drinking, he was stumbling around the dance floor, trying to dance with Priscilla Green."

"He's a liar," Elmer said to Rube in a low voice. Next to Elmer, Priscilla sat tight-lipped, two spots of red on her cheeks.

"Relax, son," said Rube. "He's got a big mouth. If he opens it wide enough, he may put his foot in it."

Switgall said, "Now, Mr. Haines, did you see the defendant at the time the Inn closed for the night?"

"Couldn't help but see him," Roderick drawled. "He was pounding on the bar, trying to get more beer. Finally, they shooed him out and he staggered to his car, leaning on Priscilla."

"That isn't true, Roderick Haines, and you know it!" cried Priscilla, standing and quivering in rage. "Not a word of that is true!"

"Sit down, young lady," said the judge sternly. "You had your chance to testify and you refused. If I hear another outburst, I'll commit you for contempt."

She sat down. "But it's not true," she whispered. Rube sat stiffly, a scowl darkening his face.

The attorney-general crossed his arms and looked at the judge. "We now submit, your honor, that we've made out a *prima facie* case."

"Not until I finish cross-examining this prize witness of yours," said Rube Claggett. "Are you through with him?"

Switgall bowed and a smug smile crossed his face. "He's all yours, Counselor."

Rube Claggett strode forward, leaned on the arm of the witness chair and stared at Haines, who drew back a little. "Now, Roderick

Clayton Haines, Jr.," the lawyer said, "what time did your rounds take you to the Tip-Top Inn that night?"

Roderick flushed slightly. "I got there about eleven o'clock."

"And you stayed until the place closed, at two?"

"That's right."

"What were you drinking all this time—soda water?"

Haines glared. "I had a few drinks. Not many."

"How many?"

"I didn't count them."

"But you counted Elmer's, didn't you? How come?" He raised his voice. "I'm asking you a question."

Switgall stood up. "Your honor, Mr. Haines isn't on trial. This line of questioning is irrelevant, incompetent and immaterial."

"I don't think so," said Rube. "It goes to his credibility as a witness. I don't think he's very credible, your honor. In fact, he's rather incredible."

"Well, get on with it," the judge said impatiently. "I'll allow the questions, up to a point."

"How many beers did you have?" asked Rube.

"I don't remember," Haines said sullenly, "but I wasn't drunk."

Rube's lower lip jutted out; he jammed his hands into the side pockets of his wrinkled seersucker coat. "Now, where were you when you saw Elmer Pickens get into his car?"

"I was already in my car, ready to leave."

"Now, of course, since you left first, you don't have any way of knowing how well Elmer Pickens drove when he started out?"

"Yes, I do know. I watched him through the rear-view mirror and he was driving like a maniac."

There was a slight smile on Rube Claggett's face. "Were you alone?"

"Yes, I was."

"Now, did Elmer Pickens overtake and pass you going down the mountain?"

The witness hesitated. "Let's see. No, I guess he didn't."

"You guess? He couldn't have, could he, or you would have come upon him after the accident? Isn't that right?"

"That's right. He didn't overtake me."

"Then you were ahead of him all the way down the mountain?"

"That's right."

"You're sure of that?"

"Positive."

"How far were you in front of Elmer Pickens when he hit Amos Pratt?"

Roderick hesitated. "Well, I must've been a good ways in front then, because I didn't see the acci-

dent. I didn't see Pratt at all."

Rube Claggett thrust his hands into the pockets of his trousers and idly jingled some change. "How fast were you driving?"

"Oh, moderate speed. Thirty, thirty-five."

There was a twisted grin on the lawyer's face. "You were driving thirty or thirty-five, yet you left the defendant, who was driving like a maniac, far behind?"

Roderick flushed and he ran his finger around his collar. "Well, he must've slowed down some, or maybe he stopped. Last time I saw him in the rear-view mirror, he was all over the road."

"But he couldn't pass you in that big flashy convertible you were driving—" Rube stopped suddenly and his eyes glinted as he stared at the witness. He chewed his lower lip thoughtfully, then turned to the bench and said, "Your honor, I'd like a ten minute recess."

The judge looked puzzled. "Are you through with this witness?"

"No, your honor. I'd like to finish my cross-examination after the recess."

"All right. Court's in recess for ten minutes."

When court opened again, Rube Claggett stood up and said, "Now, Roderick Haines, what kind of car do you drive?"

"A yellow Olds convertible."

"Is that the car you drove to the Inn that night?"

"That's right."

"But yesterday, when I saw you on the street, you were driving a pickup, weren't you? Where was your car?"

"In the garage. I was having some work done on it."

"What kind of work?"

Roderick shrugged. "Tune-up, alignment job."

Turning toward the doorway, Rube beckoned and a man in greasy work clothes entered. Rube turned back to the witness and said, "Do you know this man?"

Roderick Haines shifted his eyes. "Sure. He's Jake Kuntz of Jake's Garage."

"And he's got your car in his garage right now, hasn't he?"

"Yes."

"What happened to your car, Haines?"

"Well, the main thing is, I hit a deer. Mashed up the front end."

Elmer and Priscilla leaned forward, gripping the edge of the table.

"When did you hit the deer?" Rube Claggett asked.

"Oh, last week some time. I don't remember the exact date."

"Not last week, Haines. You drove that car to the Tip-Top. You didn't go up that mountain with a busted radiator, did you? You

banged up that car after you left the Tip-Top, didn't you? On the fifteenth you left the car at Jake's Garage, and you asked Jake to keep quiet about the repairs so your father wouldn't know you'd wrecked another car. Isn't that what you told Jake?"

Staring at Rube sullenly, the witness said, "Sure. So what? I hit a deer. You can't prove I didn't."

"Oh, can't we?" grunted Rube. He said softly, "You didn't know there's human blood on that car, did you?"

Roderick's eyes darted about and he ran his tongue around his lips. "There's not any blood on that car," he said. "I—I know there's not. If there is, it's deer blood."

"You thought you'd washed it off, didn't you? You missed something else, Haines. You missed some human hair on the grill."

Roderick Haines turned pale and swallowed a couple of times. Then his shoulders slumped and he began to sob, shielding his eyes with his hand. "I couldn't tell Daddy—he'd kill me," he said hoarsely. "The man walked right in front of me. I couldn't help it."

Rube said, "There's your case, Ambrose. There's your scummy star witness."

Judge Burnside leaned forward. "Mr. Haines, are you saying that you struck the deceased, Amos Pratt, with your car, before the defendant's car came along?"

Roderick nodded without speaking.

"Speak up, man. Did you hit Amos Pratt?"

"Yes, sir," Roderick quavered. "I didn't mean to."

The judge said wearily, "Case dismissed against Pickens. Put this witness under arrest, Sheriff." He beckoned to Rube Claggett and said in a low voice, "I'm dismissing the contempt charge, too. Guess your conduct wasn't as bad as I thought."

Rube smiled. "Marriage is a great institution, Judge." He turned to the table and began gathering up papers. "Let's go, kids," he said. "It's all over."

Priscilla and Elmer sat for a moment, stunned. Then they jumped up and Priscilla threw her arms around Rube's neck while Elmer pumped his hand vigorously. "Oh, Mr. Claggett," the girl said, "you were wonderful."

Rube grinned self-consciously. "You're kissing the wrong man, young lady. The groom over there gave me the hint when he mentioned Roderick's flashy car. It just didn't penetrate, though, till Roderick talked too much and put himself where he *could* have hit the hermit. So I asked for a recess

and rushed down to Jake's Garage. Sure enough, the front end of the car was banged in. That was just too much for coincidence."

Elmer said, "But how'd you know the blood on the car was human?"

Rube drew close and spoke in a low tone. "There wasn't any blood on that car, son. Not when I looked at it. There wasn't any hair, either."

Priscilla gasped and stared, first at Rube, then at Elmer. "Why—"

The lawyer's eyes twinkled. "Sometimes," he said, "you've got to think like a crook to trap one."

They walked across the street to Rube's office and Elmer took a checkbook from his pocket. "How much do we owe you, Mr. Claggett?"

"Oh, about a hundred. Will that leave you enough for a honeymoon?"

"Of course it will," said Priscilla. "We wouldn't be having a honeymoon except for you."

Rube Claggett took the check, endorsed it and stuffed it into Elmer's shirt pocket. "Little wedding present," he said. "Best of luck, kids."

"But Mr. Claggett—"

"No arguments," he said gruffly as he locked his arms in theirs and led them out. "I'm a busy man." He shoved them into the hall and closed the door.

Almarie said, "You're a softie, boss." She looked out the window as Elmer and Priscilla crossed the street. "They make a nice couple," she said.

He nodded. "I hope Elmer's learned a lesson. He'd better leave that booze alone. It can sure get you into trouble."

He went into his private office and reclined in his swivel chair. Reaching for the bookcase, he withdrew a bottle, took a swallow and sighed with satisfaction. "Allie," he called, propping his feet on the desk and closing his eyes, "get Doc Pritchett on the phone and see if he's free to go fishing tomorrow."

QUESADA'S is the most exclusive jewelry shop in Buenos Aires. Laurie Landis entered it purposefully. Her husband, Jeff, trailed after her, wearing the hangdog look assumed by men everywhere when they enter expensive shops with their wives.

Laurie settled herself on a padded leather stool before a crystal showcase. And when the portly proprietor bowed to her and inquired her wishes in faultless English, Laurie said, "Charms, please. Something typical of Argentina for my bracelet." She held up a slender wrist and the dangling charms on the bracelet she wore clashed softly.

Señor Quesada smiled benignly, drew a tray of charms from the case and placed it before her with a flourish. "Pure gold," he proclaimed solemnly. "24-carat guaranteed. And very inexpensive. Regard this beautiful *boleadora* . . . a typical Argentine subject. Exquisite, no?"

"Exquisite, yes," Jeff agreed over his wife's shoulder. "But inexpensive?"

"How much?" Laurie asked.

"Only 4000 pesos. About fifty dollars in your money. And no tax."

"That's a blessing," said Jeff caustically. "No tax."

"I like it," Laurie said. "And I think we can afford it, darling. After all, we'll probably never visit Buenos Aires again." Her voice was wistful.

Jeff grinned down at her affectionately. Sitting before Señor Quesada's showcase, she looked like an eager blonde child, fragile, excited, beautiful. "That reward money is burning a hole in your pocket, Laurie," he said, putting a hand on her shoulder as he stood behind her stool, a tall lanky man with a deceptively mild expression. "First it's a Sudair Tour to South America and now a solid gold *boleadora*. What will you think of next?"

The proprietor's eyes twinkled behind his rimless pince nez. "Reward money?" he asked curiously. "Is the gentleman perhaps a North American policeman?"

"He is indeed," Laurie volunteered, striking a dramatic pose. "And me, too. You see before you,

When one speaks of a sapphire sky, it is a deep-blue sky that we have in mind. A sapphire thief, however, comes in various shades of black; and he is blue only when unsuccessful.

THE SAPPHIRE THAT DISAPPEARED

by **James Holding**

Señor, the principals of a famous firm of private detectives . . . Landis & Landis."

Laurie was clowning when she said it; she was therefore very surprised at Quesada's reaction. He unpinned his glasses from the bridge of his nose, slapped the top of the counter enthusiastically with his hand, and beamed at them. "What!" he exclaimed. "The detectives who recovered the stolen jewels of Caresse Carter, the cinema star?"

Jeff stared at him. "Yes," he said, "we're Landis & Landis, all right. But how do you know about us? And Caresse Carter's jewels?"

"We have newspapers in Buenos Aires, you know," said Quesada blandly. "And that theft was played up, here. Partly because some of Miss Carter's jewels were bought in this very shop." Quesada raised his voice. "Maria! Come down! Maria is my wife," he explained. "Also my partner. She would be honored to meet Landis & Landis. You do not mind?"

"Not at all," Jeff said.

"Milagroso!" Quesada returned his pince nez to his nose and looked at Laurie. "And you, Señora, are a detective? You? So much a lady and so beautiful?"

"Well, of course." Laurie was pleased. She flashed Quesada a dazzling smile. "I'm the brains of

Landis & Landis. He's the brawn." She jerked a thumb at Jeff, who obligingly made a muscle and grinned. Being on vacation was responsible for their behaving in this light-hearted way.

Maria Quesada, a petite black-eyed woman, descended a circular staircase from the shop's upper regions. She was introduced, proclaimed herself enchanted to meet the great detectives Landis & Landis, then quietly withdrew after congratulating them upon their recovery of Miss Carter's famous jewels. Before she disappeared, however, she suggested to her husband, "Luis, why do you not ask the gentleman and his lady about the incident of last night? Perhaps they can solve our puzzle."

"What puzzle is that?" Jeff asked.

Quesada shrugged. "A lost sapphire," he said. "But fully insured." He offered another charm for Laurie's inspection, a tiny golden reproduction of a maté cup and *bombilla*. "24-carat gold, also," he said. "And very typical, the maté cup of a *gaucho*. Only 6000 pesos. No tax."

"Seventy-five clams," Jeff converted gloomily, "for something no bigger than a pea!"

Quesada launched into a eulogy of the precision craftsmanship required to produce such exquisite minatures. Laurie listened with shining eyes to this sales talk. To stem it, Jeff said hurriedly, "What about this sapphire you lost? Something mysterious about it?"

"Very mysterious," Quesada admitted. "In a way. Now, Mrs. Landis, may I point out that this *cuchillo*, this *gaucho's* knife, is only 5500 pesos?"

"And no tax," Jeff said. "Yes. But what about your lost sapphire?"

Laurie said to Quesada, "Go on, Señor Quesada, tell us your mystery. My husband will sulk all day if you don't. He is a compulsive mystery-solver, by inclination as well as trade. I'll be looking at the charms as you talk."

"We stayed open after our usual closing time last night," Quesada said, "to serve the members of your Sudair Tour. We knew your plane would get here about five. Do you know a Mrs. Thompson?" They nodded. "She came in about nine . . . our first customer after the dinner hour. She bought a beautiful set of aquamarines. It was while she was here that we lost our sapphire."

Jeff said, "You don't think she took it, do you? She's perfectly honest. And rich enough to buy anything she fancies. We've gotten to know her pretty well on this trip."

"Oh, no, Señor!" Quesada was distressed. "You misunderstand. I

do not suspect Mrs. Thompson. I know she did not take the sapphire."

"You know? How can you be sure?" This was Laurie.

"She was searched."

"Searched!" They breathed the word simultaneously, picturing the dignified Mrs. Thompson submitting to a search of her person.

"At her own request," Quesada hastened to explain. He waved an arm around him at his shop. "It is difficult to understand how a sapphire could become lost in here, eh?" he said. The room was round. Beige carpeting covered the floor to within an inch of the circular walls. There were no corners. The glass-railed staircase down which Señora Quesada had appeared led upward to the silverware department on the floor above, and downward to the vaults on the floor below. Except for the semicircle of glass display cases, set on slender pedestals around half the room's perimeter, and the leather stools that fronted them, the room was monastically bare. "All in one little minute," Quesada said in bewilderment, "the sapphire is gone."

He gave them details. It seemed that while Mrs. Thompson was looking at aquamarine necklaces, attended by Quesada, an Argentine gentleman named Ortega had come into the shop to inquire about a gift for his wife. He asked to see some unset stones. And it was while one of Quesada's clerks was bearing a tray of such stones from the vault to Señora Quesada, who was waiting on Señor Ortega, that the accident occurred.

The clerk, approaching the counter at which Ortega sat, and carrying the tray of gems before him in both hands, suddenly tripped or stumbled, and in attempting to recover his balance, dropped the tray and its contents to the floor.

Muttering apologies, the clerk immediately went to his knees and began to pick up the scattered gems. Señora Quesada came around from behind her counter and squatted gracefully to help him. Señor Quesada temporarily deserted Mrs. Thompson at the next counter and joined the retrievers. And even Mrs. Thompson, insidiously affected by the sight of half a million dollars worth of gems lying about on the rug like glass beads from a broken string, finally left her stool and also stooped to help recover the treasures.

Only Señor Ortega held himself aloof from the excitement. When the clerk stumbled and spilled the tray almost at his feet, Ortega got up from his stool with startled alacrity, but stood calmly beside it, looking on as the others scrabbled

on all fours about him, on the rug.

In less than a minute, Quesada estimated, the scattered jewels were returned to their tray. All but one. There was one missing. Quesada identified it as a 10-carat Ceylonese sapphire of pure cornflower blue color whose asking price would have been in the neighborhood of 800,000 pesos.

Followed then a painstaking search of the entire room without result. The upshot was that before Señor Ortega left the shop, he asked as a favor to him, that Quesada should have him searched, since some taint of suspicion, however faint, might cling to him if he went off to his hotel while the sapphire was still missing. Quesada protested. When Mrs. Thompson added her voice to Ortega's, however, and also begged to be searched, he yielded.

One of the clerks, thereupon, with Quesada looking on, made a thorough search of Ortega's clothing and person in the gentlemen's room belowstairs, Ortega removing his outer garments for the purpose. No sapphire came to light.

And Señora Quesada performed a like service, albeit unwillingly, for Mrs. Thompson in the ladies' retiring room abovestairs. No sapphire. And that was the way it ended. Both Ortega and Mrs. Thompson left their names and addresses with Quesada and departed.

"So where," Quesada finished, "can my sapphire have gone? Neither Mrs. Thompson nor Señor Ortega took the stone. I would trust my clerks with my life. Maria is above suspicion. And so, I assume, am I. Yet the sapphire, that was merely dropped on the rug, can nowhere be found. What, then, is the explanation?"

"A good question," Laurie said.

"A baffler," Jeff agreed, with unmistakable relish in his tone. "Let us think it over for a bit, Señor Quesada, will you? If we get any ideas, we'll let you know."

"A thousand thanks," said Quesada. "I shall be waiting in the certain knowledge that Landis & Landis will succeed where I have failed." He bowed to Laurie. "Shall I wrap up this *boleadora* charm?" he asked.

"I think we'll wait until my husband and I solve your great mystery, Señor Quesada," said Laurie with a madonna smile, "and then perhaps you'll give us a little discount on the charm."

Gallantly, Quesada rose to the occasion. "For brains, no discount is needed," he said. "As for beauty, my dear lady, will your husband permit me to say that you already possess more than your fair share of charms?"

Laurie clapped her hands in delight. They rose to leave. Jeff said, "We'll see you later, perhaps. But one question first. Did your search of the show room last night yield anything at all?"

Quesada shook his head. "Nothing." Then he suddenly grinned and reached into his pocket. "Unless you count this. I found it at the edge of the rug there." He held out to Jeff a tiny ball of paper.

Jeff smoothed it out between his fingers.

It consisted of two wrappers from sticks of Wrigley's Spearmint Gum.

They decided to have luncheon at one of Buenos Aires' famous restaurants, La Cabaña, and caught a taxicab in the Plaza San Martin just outside Quesada's shop. Riding through the broad avenues of a city so reminiscent of Paris, past parks and gardens gay with the crimson blossoms of "drunk" trees and the blue of jacaranda, they held hands like romantic teen-agers and avoided the subject of Quesada's sapphire by mutual consent.

But once La Cabaña received them into its savory comfort and they sat with their pre-luncheon gimlets at the bar, while the three-inch steaks they had ordered sputtered on an open grill nearby, they began to chatter about the case.

"This one I don't believe we can handle," began Laurie with a gamin grin at Jeff. "If you'll forgive a vulgarism, darling, this one is for the birds."

"Why?" asked Jeff.

"Why? Because there are just too many things that could have happened to that crazy sapphire, that's why. I could name you a dozen different ways it could have disappeared."

"Name me just a couple," Jeff invited.

Laurie said, "It could have dropped into the trouser cuff of one of those clerks and still be there. *They* weren't searched."

"Didn't you notice? Those boys had on cutaways with striped pants. No cuffs on the trousers. Sorry."

"Well, Ortega must have had cuffs on *his* pants."

"Searched," Jeff reminded her. "'Thoroughly searched' was Quesada's phrase, I think. Both clothing and person."

"Person!" Laurie was deprecating. "That's another thing. How thorough a search do you think they could make? And what if one of them swallowed the sapphire?"

"Not likely. A 10-carat sapphire is no aspirin tablet, honey. You'd at least need a drink of water to

wash it down, I should think. If it didn't choke you outright."

Laurie said, "Maybe Ortega was the man in the Hathaway shirt. He had an eye-patch on. And he suddenly clapped the sapphire into his eye-socket under the patch when nobody was looking."

This was greeted by several seconds of silence.

"Okay," Laurie said defensively, "think of a better one, then."

"That I can easily do," Jeff began. But Laurie interrupted him.

"Wait," she said. "What do we know the most about in this case? The people. How many of them, who they are, what they did and etcetera. So let us start with them, my dear Sherlock. If the sapphire was pinched, somebody must have pinched it. Who?"

"Oretega," said Jeff without hesitation.

"I don't see why."

"I'll tell you why. Quesada's two clerks are out on his say-so. Old retainers. Right?"

"It was one of them that precipitated the whole thing by stumbling," Laurie pointed out.

"Correct. But let's believe Quesada. If he trusts those clerks so implicitly, the stumble must have been an accident. So cross them off. Cross off Maria and Quesada, too. They owned the sapphire already. Why should they steal it? And we come up with only two other possibilities. Mrs. Thompson and Ortega."

"Mrs. Thompson! That's silly. She's a Philadelphia Quaker so honest she won't even dye her hair! And besides, you said yourself she's loaded. She could buy Quesada's whole set-up with one year's interest from her tax-free bonds." Laurie giggled. "Wasn't Señor Quesada a riot with his 'no tax' routine? And he wanted seventy-five dollars for a simple little charm!"

"Darling," Jeff brought her back, "please. If we cross off Mrs. Thompson, who's left?"

"Ortega."

"So for purposes of a hook to hang a theory on, let's agree that if anybody swiped the sapphire, it was Ortega."

"Ortega it is. *If* the sapphire was stolen."

"Where else could it go? A cornflower blue sapphire would show up against that ice cream rug of Quesada's like blue ink on a snowdrift!"

"I guess you're right. There simply wasn't any place for the sapphire to go without human help. They'd have found it in a second."

"Unless," said Jeff, flattening the two chewing gum wrappers on the table and setting his drink on them, "these two pieces of paper

have some significance. They're our only clues."

"Some clues! Quesada said his rug had been vacuumed at seven last night, during the dinner hour."

"And Mrs. Thompson was their first customer thereafter. Does she chew gum?"

"I never knew her to. She smokes a lot, though."

"You're no help." Jeff mused a moment. "The American make of gum means nothing, I'm sure. You can get it here in Buenos Aires easily enough. However, suppose one of our suspects *did* drop these wrappers on Quesada's floor. Makes you think, doesn't it?"

"Not me. Why should it?"

"Chewing gum," Jeff said. "Chewing gum. Don't you get it, Laurie? It's sticky stuff. And sticky chewing gum could pick up a sapphire off the floor, darling."

"You're mad," Laurie laughed. "Chewing gum! Whoever picked up the sapphire could do it with his fingers. Why chewing gum?"

"For concealment. A wad of chewing gum stuck between the heel and sole of a man's shoe, for example, would readily pick up any small hard object that the man stepped on just right."

"I've heard of gum-shoe detectives," Laurie said, "but this is ridiculous!"

Jeff ignored her. "In which case," he pointed out, "the chewing gum *and* the sapphire that was sticking to it would have been discovered immediately when Ortega's clothes and person were searched."

"I suppose so."

"But I like the chewing gum idea." Jeff brightened. "We can check whether they *did* find any chewing gum. Excuse me a minute." He stood up and left the bar abruptly.

In five minutes he was back. "Guess what?" he said. "The telephone operator could speak English!" He sipped his drink. "I talked to Quesada on the phone. Neither of the clerks and neither of the Quesadas *ever* chews gum. Further, no chewing gum has been found anywhere in the shop, chewed or unchewed. Not on Ortega. Not on Mrs. Thompson. Not on the rug or the floor. Not in any waste basket or ashtray." Jeff grinned at his wife. "Isn't that lovely? No chewing gum."

Laurie said, "Ortega was probably still chewing it when he was searched."

Jeff shook his head. "No. The guard made him open up and say 'a-a-ah'."

"Swallowed it in his agitation, then."

"Not likely."

Laurie drained the last few drops of her cocktail. "But didn't Que-

sada realize that the place to look for used chewing gum is under the stools at the counters?"

"He went and looked there at my suggestion," Jeff laughed. "No chewing gum."

"Wait a minute." Laurie sobered. "The clerks. One of them stepped on the gum when Ortega threw it away. It stuck to his shoe. And he picked up the sapphire unknowingly by stepping on it when they were all scurrying around retrieving the jewels. Call Quesada again, darling, and tell him the sapphire is on the bottom of one of his clerk's shoes. Or his own. Or Mrs. Quesada's."

"I don't want to sound smug," Jeff said. "But I thought of that, too. No good."

Laurie sighed. "Well, let's have lunch. Those steaks are about done."

After luncheon, they returned to their hotel for a brief *siesta,* a pleasant habit they had acquired on this trip to South America. But on this occasion, Jeff didn't sleep. He left Laurie napping in their room and seized the opportunity to hunt up their fellow tourist, Mrs. Thompson. In the lobby of the hotel, the Sudair Tour Director told him she might possibly still be in the portrait photographer's salon on the hotel's mezzanine floor, having her picture taken dressed as a *gaucho.* Jeff found the shop, barged in, and sure enough, there was Mrs. Thompson. He struggled to keep from smiling at the spectacle of the dignified gray-haired widow posing in the flat cowboy hat and striped poncho of the *pampas.* After greeting her warmly, he quizzed her, between shots, about her experience at Quesada's shop the evening before.

Half an hour later, he woke Laurie. He reported his chat with Mrs. Thompson while Laurie listened closely. "Mrs. Thompson looked on last night's incident as a very exciting adventure," he said. "She describes Ortega as tall, handsome, suave, with a slight romantic limp, impeccably dressed, the perfect Latin gentleman of means, certainly not the type to go around pinching people's sapphires, in her opinion."

"What about the search?" Laurie asked.

"Mrs. Thompson says the search to which she was subjected by Señora Quesada, although unwillingly undertaken, was a very good, thorough search, all the same."

"Good. Then it is reasonable to assume that Ortega got the same thorough treatment. Or more so."

"Right. Now, her next answer. Mrs. Thompson doesn't ever chew

gum. Nor would she even carry it."

"Ortega." Laurie said. "He's our boy."

"It seems so." Jeff made a face at her, the gimlet-eyed squint of the fictional private eye. "Mrs. Thompson happened to raise her eyes from her aquamarines at one point last night, and saw Ortega slip a stick of gum into his mouth so casually as to almost seem surreptitious."

"Oho!" cried Laurie.

"You may well say 'oho!' She remembers the gum because it wrecked her initial image of Ortega as a man of breeding."

"So where are we?" Laurie summed up. "Ortega took the sapphire. He used sticky chewing gum in the process, someway, presumably to make the sapphire adhere to it. But where, and I repeat where, did he conceal the chewing gum *and* the sapphire while he was being given such a thorough stem-to-stern search?"

They sat in silence for several minutes. "I believe," Jeff said at length, "you have put your pinkie on what, for lack of a better term, we shall call the crux. And to mix a metaphor, our whole theory founders on that crux. Without an answer to your question, we're still out in left field." He sighed and stood up. "Let's go take a ride on the Buenos Aires *subterráneo*," he proposed, "before Quesada telephones to say he has found his sapphire in his hip pocket with his Diner's Club card. They tell me the B. A. subways are cleaner, faster and less crowded than ours."

They left the hotel.

Afterwards, Jeff claimed it was the subway ride that should be credited with the solution of Quesada's puzzle. Laurie claimed it was just dumb luck.

Whatever it was, the light broke over them when they left the subway at the Diagonal Norte station and ascended to the surface. Emerging from the subway exit, they almost collided with a blind man tapping his way along the sidewalk. Jeff muttered "sorry," and stepped back, jostling Laurie in the process.

"Be careful," Laurie said. Then she added, "And now you're blocking traffic."

But Jeff didn't hear her. He was staring at the cause of their collision. She followed his eyes. Then she got it, too. They turned together back into the subway entrance, moved by a common impulse.

"To the Plaza San Martin," said Jeff with definite cavalry charge overtones.

"Back to Quesada's," Laurie said.

Ten minutes later, in the silverware department of Quesada's, the portly bespectacled proprietor was answering their questions.

"Mrs. Thompson says Ortega had a limp," Jeff began. "Did he?"

"Yes."

"And did he, therefore, carry a cane to help him walk?"

"But of course, Señor Landis."

Jeff and Laurie looked at each other and smiled. Laurie said, "Was it a slender cane, a thick one, what kind, do you remember?"

"Thick. A Malacca stick, very sturdy."

"How thick at the tip, would you say?"

Quesada shrugged. "Two centimeters, perhaps one and a half. I paid no attention. Furthermore, there was a rubber cap over the stick's tip, I believe."

"Better and better," Jeff said with satisfaction. "Think carefully now. When you took Señor Ortega down to the washroom to search him last night, did he take his stick with him?"

Quesada nodded.

"Very good. And when you began to search him, when he removed his clothes for your inspection, where was the stick?"

"He leaned it against the wall of the washroom."

"Ah." Laurie took over. "And you did not examine the stick itself when you were searching Ortega for the sapphire?"

"I did not. To what purpose? Can a smooth stick of solid wood hide a 10-carat sapphire?"

Jeff gave him an engaging smile. "It could," he said.

"Fasten your seat belts!" Laurie crowed, "here we go!"

Quesada ventured, "Something about Ortega's cane?"

"His cane indeed," Jeff said. "He used it three times last night. Once to trip up your clerk who was carrying the tray of stones. Once to pick up the sapphire from the floor without even stooping over. And once to conceal the gem from your search."

"I do not follow," Quesada said. But his eyes were shining behind their glasses.

"Ortega chewed up some chewing gum," Jeff said, "after entering your shop last night. And he made his only mistake when, without thinking, he threw the crumpled wrappers away on your floor. He sat at your counter with his cane across his lap. And when your clerk went to get unset stones for his inspection, Ortega slipped the rubber cap off his cane tip, and put the freshly chewed gum from his mouth into the end of the stick, which had been carefully hollowed out beforehand to receive it."

Quesada started to say some-

thing, but Laurie anticipated his question. "Your wife, who was waiting on Ortega, couldn't see this from behind her counter. Neither would anybody who was not looking carefully at Ortega in that split second. And nobody was. When your clerk came back from the vault with the tray of stones, Ortega skillfully tripped him up with his cane. And when he stood beside his stool, while the rest of you were picking up jewels from the rug, Ortega merely placed the tip of his stick firmly over the jewel nearest his feet . . . which happened to be your Ceylonese sapphire. He pressed down with the stick; the chewing gum swallowed up the sapphire, holding it fast in the hollow of the stick's end. And then, when Ortega sat down again, when the excitement was over and you were all looking at the empty space on the jewel tray, Ortega slipped the rubber cap over the end of his stick again. The deed was done. The sapphire had disappeared. And the cane stood innocently against the washroom wall while Ortega was searched at his own clever request. Wasn't that beautifully simple?"

Quesada listened in astonishment. At the end, he jerked his pince nez from his nose, slapped the counter resoundingly, and turning to Laurie, clearly revealed an unsuspected knowledge of American western stories.

"Dios!" was what he said, quite reverently. "Landis & Landis ride again!"

Fifteen minutes before their Sudair Tour was due to leave the hotel for the airport, whence they would fly across the Plata estuary to Montevideo, a tiny package was delivered to their room as they were closing their bags for imminent departure. Jeff ripped it open to find a brief note and a small item wrapped in tissue paper. The note read:

> An hour ago, the Police at my request located Señor Ortega at the address he so brazenly left with me. They examined his stick. And the sapphire was still there, exactly as you said, stuck in a wad of chewing gum under the rubber cap. What better hiding place could he have found? Maria and I salute Landis & Landis. And we beg, on behalf of our insurance company, that your lady will graciously accept the enclosed *boleadora* charm for her bracelet at 100% discount from the quoted price. *Adios.*
>
> Luis Quesada
>
> P.S. No tax!

Unquestionably, gentlemen have a place in the mystery stories of my fine publication. For one thing, their correct behavior can be something of an irritant. And sometimes—ever mindful to do the right thing—they kill someone or other.

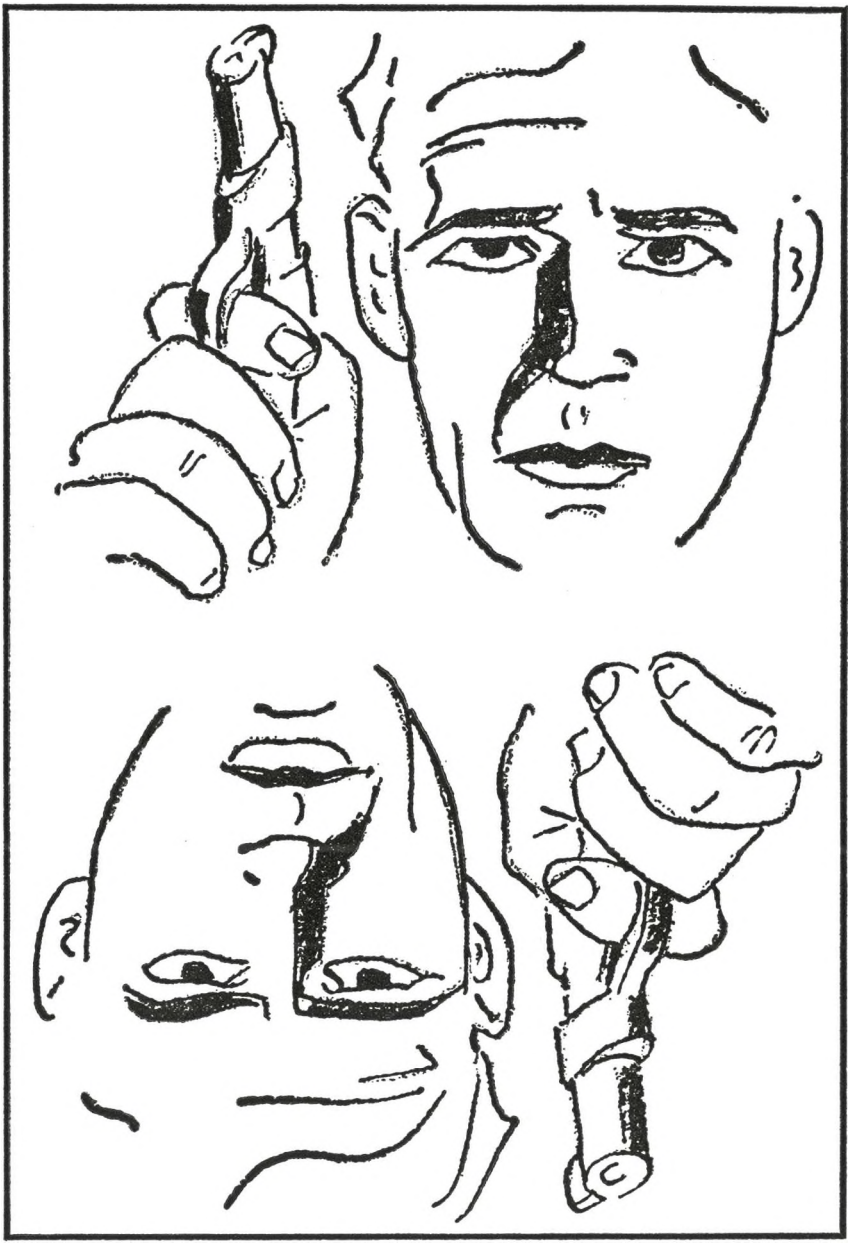
HOMICIDE and GENTLEMEN

A NOVELETTE
by Fletcher Flora

LIEUTENANT JOSEPH MARCUS walked past the ninth hole, par-four, with a fine official disregard of the green. It wasn't quite disregard, however, for there was in his performance a degree of deliberate malice that expressed itself by a digging-in of the heels and a scuffing of the toes. Lieutenant Marcus, who had been a poor boy and was still a poor man, felt an unreasonable animus for the game of golf and a modest contempt, in spite of certain famous devotees, for the folk who played it. He was by nature gentle and tolerant, though, and he was faintly ashamed of his feeling and its expression of petty vandalism.

With Sergeant Bobo Fuller at his side, although a half step to the rear, he descended from the green on a gentle slope and moved rapidly across clipped grass toward a place where the ground dipped suddenly to form a rather steep bank. Sergeant Fuller, whose name was really something besides Bobo that almost everyone had forgotten, did not lag the half step because he found it impossible to stay abreast. Neither did he lag as a pretty deference to rank. Sergeant Fuller did not give a damn about rank, to tell the truth. He didn't give a damn about Lieutenant Marcus either, and that was why he maintained the half step interval. He considered Marcus a self-made snob who read books and put on airs, and the interval was subtle evidence of a dislike of which the sergeant was rather proud and the lieutenant was vaguely aware.

Going over the lip of the bank,



Marcus dug in his heels again, this time with the perfectly valid purpose of retarding his descent. At the bottom he was on level ground that again tilted, after a bit, into a gentle slope. Fifty yards ahead was a small lake glittering in the morning sunlight. Between Marcus and the lake, somewhat nearer to him and almost in the shade of a distinguished and gnarled oak, was a group composed of four men and a boy. The boy was holding, in one hand, a fishing rod with a spinning reel attached; in the other, a small green tackle box. Two of the four men were uniformed policemen who had been dispatched from police headquarters to maintain the status quo for Marcus, who had not been on hand at the time, and a third was, as it turned out, a caretaker who had walked into a diversion on his way to work across the course. The fourth man was lying on his face on the grass, his head pointed in the direction of the bank behind Marcus and Fuller, and he was, Marcus had been assured, dead. That was, in fact, why Marcus and Fuller were there. They were there because the man on the grass was dead in a manner and place considered suspicious by public authorities hired to consider such things, which included Marcus, who also secretly considered the whole development something of an imposition.

Speaking to the pair of policemen, with the air of abstraction that had contributed to his reputation for snobbishness, he knelt beside the body to make an examination that he felt certain would yield nothing of any particular significance. This pessimistic approach was natural to him, and he was always surprised when things turned out better than he had hoped or expected. Well, the man was dead, of course. He had been shot, apparently in the heart, by what appeared to have been a small caliber gun. From the condition of the body, he judged that the shooting had occurred not many hours earlier, for rigor mortis was not advanced. These things were always hedged about by qualifications, however, and it was doubtful that the so-called estimate of the coroner, who was presumably on the way, would be much closer to the truth than Marcus's guess. Sometime between was the way Marcus expressed it somewhat bitterly to himself. Between midnight, say, and dawn.

Still with the irrational feeling of being imposed upon, Marcus made other observations and guesses. Age, thirty to thirty-five. Height, about five-eleven. Weight, give or take ten pounds on either

side of one-seventy. Hair, light brown and crew cut. Eyes, open and blind and blue. White shirt, blood stained. Narrow tie, striped with two shades of brown, and summer worsted trousers, also brown. Brown socks, brown shoes. Lying on the grass, about five paces away, a jacket to match the pants. In the right side pocket of the pants, coins amounting to the sum of one dollar and twenty-three cents. Also a tiny gold pen knife. In the left hip pocket, buttoned in, a wallet. In the wallet, besides eighteen dollars in bills, several identifying items, including a driver's license and a membership card in Blue Cross-Blue Shield. *Well,* Marcus thought, *they won't have to pay off on this one.* According to both the license and the membership card, the dead man was someone named Alexander Gray. With all items officially appropriated and in his own jacket pocket, Marcus walked over to the brown jacket on the grass and found nothing in it. Nothing at all.

"Who found the body?" he asked of whoever wanted to answer.

"The kid found him," one of the policemen said.

Marcus turned to the boy, about twelve from the looks of him, who still held the rod and reel and tackle box as if he feared that they, too, might be appropriated. Marcus had no such intention, of course, but he wished he could borrow them and spend the day using them instead of doing what he had to do. Marcus liked kids, but he seldom showed it. It was his misfortune that he seldom showed anything, and much of the little he did show was a kind of characteristic distortion of what he actually thought and felt.

"What's your name, sonny?" he said.

"William Peyton Hausler," the boy said.

It was obvious that he was stating his name fully in an attempt to secure a status, however limited by his minority, that would establish his innocence and insure the respectful treatment to which he was entitled.

"You live around here?"

"On the street over there, the other side of the golf course." He gestured with the hand holding the rod and reel to indicate the direction.

"Looks like you're going fishing."

"Yes, sir. In the lake."

"You fish here often?"

"Pretty often. The manager of the club said it was all right."

"It doesn't look like much of a lake. Any fish in it?"

"It's stocked. Crappie and bass, mostly. Club members fish in it. I'm not a member—my dad isn't—but the manager said it was all right for me to fish."

"What time was it when you found the body?"

"I don't know exactly. It hadn't been light long. About six-thirty, I guess. I wanted to get to the lake early because the fish bite better then."

"That's what I hear. Early morning and late evening. What'd you do when you found the body?"

"Nothing much. I walked up close to it, and I spoke a couple of times to see if there'd be any answer, but there wasn't, and I was pretty scared because I could tell something was wrong, and just then Mr. Tompkins came along."

"You touch anything at all?"

"No, sir. Not a thing."

"Who's Mr. Tompkins?"

"This is him. He's one of the caretakers."

"Okay. Thanks, sonny. You better go on and see if you can still catch some fish."

The boy went on down the gentle slope to the little lake, and Marcus turned to Tompkins, who was a leathery-looking man who appeared to be in his sixties. He was dressed in faded twill pants and a blue work shirt of heavy material like the ones that Marcus had worn with roomy bib overalls as a kid.

"Is that right?" Marcus said. "What the kid told me?"

"I guess so. Far as I know. When I got here, he was just standing and staring at the body. He looked scared."

"No wonder. Kids don't find a body every day. What'd you do?"

"I looked at the body, not touching it, and I could see a little blood where it had seeped out in the grass. I told the kid to stay and watch things while I hustled up to the Club House to call the police."

"The Club House open that early in the morning?"

"No. There's a phone booth on the back terrace. I happened to have a dime."

"Lucky you did. I usually don't. After you called the police, did you come back here and wait?"

"That's right. Just came back and waited with the kid and didn't bother anything."

"Good. You did just right. I don't suppose you know this guy?"

"The dead man, you mean? I never saw him before."

"All right. You might as well go on to work." Marcus turned away to a uniform. "You go up to the Club House and bring the manager down here. You can tell him what's happened if he's curious."

The caretaker and the policeman went off in different directions,

one toward the Club House and the other, presumably, toward whatever building sheltered the equipment for taking care, and Marcus began to prowl slowly the area around the body. He wasn't looking for anything in particular, just anything he could find, and he found nothing. No significant marks in the clipped grass growing from hard earth. No small item conveniently dropped that might later point to a place or person. Not even, he thought bitterly, a lousy cigarette butt.

The brown jacket bothered him. Why the hell had the dead man taken it off? Before he was dead, of course. And why had he left it lying on the ground five yards or so from where he had walked to be killed? Unless he had been moved *after* being killed, which didn't seem probable. And why, for that matter, had he been here on the golf course at all? A golf course did not seem to Marcus to be a likely place to be in the hours between midnight and dawn, sometime between, but then a golf course did not seem to Marcus a likely place to be at any time whatever, unless you came, like the kid, to fish in a lake or to lie on the grass under a tree and wish that you were something besides what you had become.

Fuller, watching Marcus, was tempted to ask him what he was looking for, but he resisted the temptation. Anyhow, quite correctly, he guessed that Marcus didn't know himself, and he was determined to avoid giving, in front of the uniform, the impression of a dumb cop appealing to his superior for enlightenment. Marcus was already, in Fuller's opinion, sufficiently overrated at headquarters. As it turned out, after a few minutes, the appeal went the other way, but it was no triumph for Fuller, after all, for it only forced him to admit what he had hoped to conceal.

"Any ideas, Fuller?" Marcus said.

"Not yet," Fuller said. "I've been trying to figure it."

"So have I, but I haven't had any luck, and I doubt if I ever do. As I see it, a guy who got himself shot on a golf course must have been crazy, and crazy people make the worst kind of murder victims from a cop's point of view because it's almost impossible to figure logically why they did what they did that got them killed."

Sure, Fuller thought. *Read me a lecture about it, you topnotch snob. The Psychology of Nuts by Dr. Joseph Marcus.*

He was saved from making a reply by the return of the other uniform and a small man in Ber-

muda shorts and heavy ribbed stockings that reached almost to his knees. Marcus approved of the shorts, for he was always one for keeping comfortable, but he was damned if he could understand why anyone would deliberately qualify the effect of the shorts by wearing the stockings. Which was, however, he conceded, none of his business.

"You the manager of this club?" Marcus said.

"Yes," the small man said. "Paul Iverson."

"I'm Lieutenant Joseph Marcus, Mr. Iverson. We've got a body here."

"Yes, yes. I know. The officer told me."

"He was shot."

"It's incredible. I can hardly believe it."

"It looks like someone took advantage of the privacy of your golf course to commit a murder."

Iverson's expression, although indicating shock and a shade of nausea, was primarily one of resentment. Among the activities of the club, he palpably felt, one expected and accepted certain indiscretions and transgressions of the peccadillo type, but murder was neither expected nor acceptable and ought to cause someone to lose his membership.

"Are you certain that it's murder?" he said. "Perhaps he killed himself."

"With his finger, maybe?"

"Oh, I see. There's no gun."

"Right. No gun. Besides, there's no powder marks on his shirt. He was shot from a distance."

"Do you think it could have been an accident of some sort?"

"It could have been, but I don't think so."

"Well, it's a terrible thing. Simply terrible. I can't understand it at all."

"You're luckier than me. You don't have to understand it. All you have to do is see if you recognize the body."

Iverson hesitated, then walked over to the body and looked intently for a moment into blind blue eyes. When he straightened and turned back to Marcus, the shade of nausea in his face had deepened, but there was also a new element of relief, as if the worst, which had been anticipated, had not developed.

"I don't know him," he said. "I can assure you that he was not a member of this club."

"Well, that's all right," Marcus said with an unworthy feeling of spite. "Maybe the murderer is."

"I believe you'll find that he is not. I find it inconceivable that a member of this club should be involved in anything like this. It will

create a dreadful fuss, I'm afraid, as it is. We may have some withdrawals."

"Are you positive this man was not a member? His name was Alexander Gray."

"I'm quite positive. Our membership is limited, rather exclusive, and I'm acquainted with all members. That's why I'm convinced that none of them could be involved."

"Even exclusive people can commit murder, Mr. Iverson. Possibly even exclusive people you happen to be acquainted with. Never mind, though. Thanks for coming down."

Marcus turned away abruptly, and there was in his movement an implication of disdain that made Iverson flush and Sergeant Fuller curse softly under his breath. Aware that he had been dismissed, the manager went back across the course toward the Club House, only the roof of which was visible beyond the rise. Marcus went over and picked up the brown worsted jacket from the grass where he had dropped it after exploring the pockets.

"I wonder where the coroner is," he said.

"He'll be along," Fuller said.

"Well, I won't wait for him. You stay here and find out what he's got to say. Nothing much, I suspect. Because he never does."

Sergeant Fuller was curious about Marcus's plans, but he was damned if he would give him the satisfaction of knowing it. He watched Marcus go off toward the Club House, where they'd left their car in the parking lot, and he cursed again under his breath, Marcus for what he was, and the coroner for not coming.

In the car, unaware that he had been cursed, or even that he had given cause for cursing, Marcus checked Alexander Gray's driver's license for an address. The street and number rang a faint bell, and he sat quietly for a minute, concentrating, trying to fit the location properly into a kind of mental map of the city. If his mental cartography was correct, which it was, Gray had lived not more than a mile from the entrance to this club. Probably somewhat less. Marcus looked at his watch and saw that it was two minutes after nine o'clock. Starting the car, he drove down a macadam drive and slipped into the traffic of a busy suburban street. He swung off after awhile and was soon parked at the curb in front of a buff brick apartment building which displayed in large chrome numbers above the double front doors the address on the license.

Inside on the ground floor, he

found the apartment of the building superintendent, who turned out to be, when he had opened his door in response to Marcus's ring, a wispy little man with wispy gray hair and pince-nez clipped to the bridge of a surprisingly bold nose. Marcus introduced himself and received an introduction. The superintendent's name was Mr. Everett Price.

"Is there an Alexander Gray living in the building?" Marcus asked.

"Yes." Mr. Price removed the pince-nez, which were, of course attached to a black ribbon, and held them by the spring clip in his right hand. "He's in three-o-six. He shares the apartment with Mr. Rufus Fleming."

"Oh? Have Mr. Gray and Mr. Fleming shared the apartment long?"

"About two years, I think. Yes, two years this summer. Perfect gentlemen, both of them. Quiet and good-mannered. There is, in fact, something old-fashioned in their manners. Rather courtly, you know. It isn't often, nowadays, that you find that quality in younger men."

"I agree. It's rare. Do you know if Mr. Fleming is in at the moment?"

"No, I don't. It's possible, however, this being Saturday. Mr. Fleming doesn't work on Saturday."

"I wish I didn't. I believe I'll just go up and speak with Mr. Fleming, if you don't mind."

Mr. Price looked confused. He scrubbed the lenses of the pince-nez with a clean white handerchief and clipped them to his big nose again, peering at Marcus as if he had decided that some revision of his first judgment of him had become necessary.

"Excuse me," he said. "I thought you wanted to see Mr. Gray."

"I didn't say that," Marcus said. "I only asked if Mr. Gray lived here."

"Yes. So you did. I made an assumption, I suppose. In any event, it's quite likely that both gentlemen are in this morning."

"I wonder if you would come up with me. Just in case neither of them is."

Now Mr. Price looked startled. Possibly he had suddenly gathered from Marcus's tone that Marcus was certainly going up in spite of anything, although willing to make a nice pretense of asking permission, and that the superintendent was damn well coming up with him, whether he was agreeable or not.

"What on earth for?" Mr. Price said.

"So that you can let me into the

apartment, if that is necessary."

"Oh, I couldn't do that without authorization from the tenants. It's unthinkable."

"Is it? I don't believe so. You can try thinking about it on the way up. You may change your mind."

"I'm reasonably certain that either Mr. Fleming or Mr. Gray will be in on a Saturday morning."

"Mr. Fleming, maybe. Not Mr. Gray. Mr. Gray will never be in again. He's dead. He has, it seems, been murdered."

The pince-nez popped off Mr. Price's nose and jerked and swung at the end of their ribbon. Marcus had a bleak vision of a trap sprung, a body hanging.

"What did you say?"

Marcus didn't bother to repeat himself. He merely waited for the information to soak in and become tenable.

"This is dreadful," Mr. Price said.

"So it is."

"Why would anyone murder Mr. Gray? He was such a pleasant man."

"Pleasant people are sometimes murdered. Usually by unpleasant people."

"When did it happen? Where?"

"Never mind that now. You'll know soon enough. Everyone will. Now I would like to go upstairs and see Mr. Fleming if he's in, or look through the apartment if he's not."

"Yes," said Mr. Price. "Yes, of course."

They went up three floors and rang the bell of three-o-six. Mr. Fleming was either not in or not answering. The former was true, as Marcus learned immediately after Mr. Price had opened the door for him. The apartment consisted of a living room, a large bedroom with two beds, a bath and a small kitchen. No one was there. The beds were made and the kitchen was clean and the living room was orderly. Mr. Gray and Mr. Fleming had been tidy housekeepers. Mr. Fleming, so far as Marcus knew, still was.

"Did Fleming spend the night here?" he asked.

"I don't know. He was here early, as Mr. Gray was, but he may have gone out again and not returned."

"All right. Thanks. I won't need you any longer. And don't worry about the apartment. I'll leave it in good order."

Mr. Price didn't look convinced, but he left. Marcus went into the bedroom and began to prowl. He opened drawers and looked into closets, but all he achieved was confirmation of the judgment he had already made—that Mr. Gray

and Mr. Fleming were clean and orderly enough to please the most fastidious woman. In the living room, after poking into places and scanning the titles of books that struck him as being intolerably dull on the whole, he stopped before the mantel of a dummy fireplace to look at a picture. A photograph of a young woman. Inscribed. He took it down and read the inscription: *For Rufe and Alex with all my love, Sandy.* The double inscription implied a Platonic meaning at variance, it seemed to Marcus, with the totality of love. He scratched his head and examined Sandy's face.

It was a lovely face. A wistful face. Shaped like a small, lean heart. Big eyes with sadness in them. Tenderness in them. Passion in them? Passion, at least, in the soft lips set in the merest of smiles. In spite of the suggested passion, however, there was—Marcus groped for the word—a kind of mysticism. He was falling, in an instant, half in love.

Putting the photograph back on the mantel, he turned away. Then he turned back. On the mantel, placed squarely below a reproduction of Daumier's *Don Quixote and Sancho Panza* that hung on the wall above, was a sizable leather case. He removed the case and opened it. Inside, nested in plush, was a matched pair of .22 caliber target pistols. Both clean. Both lately oiled. Beautifully cared for. *The purloined letter still makes its point,* he thought. In his attention to drawers and closets, he had nearly overlooked the case in plain sight. Not, so far as he could see at the moment, that it would have made any particular difference if he had. Nevertheless, he appropriated the case and took it with him when he left. That was after he had returned once more to the bathroom and stood for a few minutes with an abstracted air before the open medicine cabinet above the lavatory.

Downstairs, he rang the superintendent's bell again. Mr. Price, clearly relieved to see him on his way out, made a polite effort not to show it.

"Are you finished, Lieutenant?" he said.

"Yes. For the present, at least. I'm taking this with me. It's a pair of matched target pistols. Was either Mr. Gray or Mr. Fleming an enthusiast for target shooting, do you know?"

"Both were, as a matter of fact. Sunday mornings, fair days, they have gone off regularly for matches. I believe they made small wagers. I do hope you will take good care of the pistols."

"The best. I'll give you a re-

ceipt for them if you want me to."

"I'm sure that won't be necessary."

"Thanks. By the way, there's a photograph on the mantel upstairs. A young lady. Blonde hair cut quite short. Very pretty face. It's signed Sandy. Do you know her by any chance?"

"I've met her. Miss Sandra Shore. She was introduced to me in the hall one evening when I happened to encounter her with Mr. Gray and Mr. Fleming. Afterward, on several occassions, I exchanged a few words with her when she came to call."

"Has she come here often?"

"Frequently. Many times, I suppose, when I didn't see her. I'm sure that it was all quite proper. She was equally the friend of both gentlemen. They had been friends, she told me once, since childhood. It was quite a charming relationship."

"I'm sure it was. Tell me, do you know Miss Shore's address?"

"No, but it's probably in the directory."

"Would you mind checking it for me?"

"Not at all."

Marcus was invited in, but he preferred to wait in the hall. After a few minutes Mr. Price returned with the address written down on a sheet from a memo pad. Engaging again in mental cartography, Marcus located the address in relation to where he was.

"One more question, if you don't mind," he said, "and I'll run along. I assume both Mr. Gray and Mr. Fleming own automobiles?"

"Only one between them, which they both used. One might think that such an arrangement would lead to difficulties, but they apparently worked it out very well."

"Mr. Gray and Mr. Fleming seem to have been extremely compatible. Share apartment. Share car. Share girl. Most commendable. Where is the car kept?"

"There's a garage at the rear, just off the alley. Stall number five. The automobile, if you wish to know, is a Ford. I'm not sure of the model. Recent, however."

"Thanks again. You've been most helpful."

Marcus turned with his sometimes offensive abruptness and went out of the building and around to the garage. Stall number five was occupied by a 1960 Ford. Mr. Fleming, wherever he was, was obviously moving either by shank's mare or in some other vehicle than his own. Marcus, in the one furnished by the department, drove to the address on the memo sheet, and this time it was unnecessary to disturb the super-

intendent, for there was a directory of tenants in the entrance hall that told him where to go, and he went.

The photographer who had taken Sandra Shore's picture, he learned, was an artist. He had caught on paper precisely the elfin and haunting quality of her face. The sadness and tenderness and passion assembled in the lean heart. Now, in person, there was more, of course. A small and slender body exquisitely formed, suggesting its delights in a boyish white blouse and a narrow skirt. Marcus, in the hall, held his hat and offered up a short and silent paean.

"Yes?" Sandra Shore said.

"My name is Marcus," Marcus said. "Lieutenant Joseph Marcus. Of the police. I wonder if I may speak with you for a few minutes?"

She surveyed him gravely, her head cocked a little to one side.

"Whatever for?"

"It will take only a few minutes. I'd appreciate it very much."

"Well, if you are actually a policeman, you will certainly speak with me whether I am willing or not, so there isn't really much use in asking my permission, is there?"

"It distresses me, but I must admit that you're right. Thank you for clarifying the situation so nicely. May I come in?"

She nodded and closed the door after him, when he was across the threshold. Following her into the living room to a chair in which he sat, he admired her neat ankles and lovely legs. When she was in another chair across from him, the narrow skirt tucked primly beneath her knees, which showed, he continued to admire the legs for a moment, discreetly, but soon went back to her face, which was the best of her, after all, in spite of distractions.

"You don't look like a policeman," she said.

"Don't I? I wouldn't know. What is a policeman supposed to look like?"

"I'm not sure. Not like you, however. What do you wish to speak with me about?"

"Not what, really. Who. A young man named Alexander Gray."

"Alex?" She managed to appear slightly incredulous without, somehow, disturbing the serenity of her expression. "What possible interest could the police have in Alex?"

"He's dead. Murdered, apparently. Someone shot him sometime early this morning on the course of the Greenbrier Golf Club."

She sat quite still, her only movement the folding of her hands in her lap. In her great, grave eyes there was a slight darkening, as if a light had been turned down.

"That's ridiculous."

"The truth is often ridiculous. Things don't seem to make sense."

"Alex isn't even a member of the Greenbrier Golf Club."

"Apparently you don't have to be a member to be killed on the course."

"I simply refuse to believe you. It's cruel of you to come here and tell me such a lie."

"It would be cruel if I did. And pointless."

"I see what you mean. You would have no reason. Unless there's a reason that I can't understand. Is there?"

"No. None whatever. Surely you realize that."

"I suppose I do. I suppose I must believe you after all." She stood up suddenly and walked over to a window and stood there for a minute looking out, slim and erect against the glass, her pale hair catching afire from the slanting light. Then she returned, sitting again, tucking the skirt and folding her hands. "Poor Alex," she said. "Poor little Alex."

He hadn't been so little. Average height, at least, but Marcus skipped it. Miss Sandra Shore was striking him as a remarkable young woman. There was genuine grief in her voice, in her darkened eyes, but her face was in repose, fixed as serenely in shock and grief as it had been in the photograph.

"You are very composed under the circumstances," he said. "I'm relieved and thankful."

"Perhaps I can't quite accept it yet, in spite of knowing that it must be true."

"Sometimes it takes awhile for things to hit us hard. Do you feel like talking with me now?"

"What do you want to know?"

"You were a good friend of Alexander Gray's. Is that true?"

"Yes, it's true, but I can't imagine how you know. Unless you've talked with Rufe. Have you?'

"Rufus Fleming? No. I'd like to talk with him, however. I don't know where he is."

"Have you been to the apartment? Alex and Rufe lived together, you know."

"Yes, I know. I've been there. Do you have any idea where Fleming could be?"

"Just out somewhere, I imagine. He'll show up soon."

"His car was in the garage."

"Rufe often walks places. Quite long distances sometimes. He enjoys it."

"There was a photograph of you in their apartment. A very good one. I noticed that it was inscribed to both Gray and Fleming. All your love. Were you an equally good friend to both?"

"Equally? That's so hard to judge, isn't it? I loved them both. I still love them both, even though Alex must be dead, since you say so."

"Did they both love you?"

"Oh, yes. We all loved each other."

"Isn't that a rather unusual relationship to exist among two men and a woman?"

"I don't think so. Perhaps it is. It has been that way for so long that it seems perfectly natural to me."

"Didn't it ever get complicated"?

"Well, it was difficult in certain ways. They both loved me and wanted to marry me, and I loved both of them, which was all right, and wanted to marry both of them, which was not, and that's where the difficulty was."

"I understand. Bigamy is no solution. Besides being illegal."

"Yes. Anyhow, I couldn't bear to marry one of them and not the other, for that would surely have meant giving up entirely the one I didn't marry. If only I could have married one of them and kept the other one around as always, it would have been all right, but it wouldn't have worked, I'm sure, for a husband is different from a friend, no matter how good and tolerant he may be, and will become possessive and insistent upon his rights and resentful of the attentions to his wife of another man."

Marcus didn't quite believe her. Not her words. He believed *them,* all right. He didn't quite believe *her*. That she existed. That she was sitting this instant in the chair across from him with her knees together and her skirt tucked in. He was, in fact, more than a little confused by what seemed at once perfectly logical and utterly insane. That was it, he decided. It was logical, but nuts. There was not necessarily any contradiction in that.

"You said this relationship had existed for a long time," he said. "How long?"

"Oh, years and years. Ages. Since we were very young."

"You all knew each other then?"

"Isn't that what I said? Went through school together and have remained close to each other since."

"It's strange, to say the least, that two men should remain such friends in such circumstances."

"Well, they were very sweet and tolerant and understanding, and they kept thinking something could be worked out, but, as I said, there was no way to work it satisfactorily."

"Now, however, the problem has resolved itself."

"You mean, because Alex is

dead, that there is nothing to keep me from marrying Rufe? That may be true, but I'll have to think about it. It doesn't seem quite fair to Alex. A kind of unfair advantage for Rufe, you know. I may be compelled by fairness to give him up also."

Marcus slapped a knee sharply and stood up and walked around his chair and sat down again. He closed his eyes and opened them, and she was still there.

"There was a pair of target pistols in the apartment," he said. "The superintendent told me they were bugs about target shooting. Is that so?"

"Oh, yes, and so am I. I have a pistol like the ones you saw. It all started when we were quite young. In the beginning, we used bb pistols. We lived in a small town, only a short walk into the country, and we used to go out together frequently, the three of us, and have matches. Would you like to see my pistol?"

"It would be kind of you to show it to me."

"Not at all."

She got up and went to a desk and returned in a minute with the pistol, which was, as she had said, apparently identical with the two he had appropriated. Clean, recently oiled. He took it and examined it and handed it back to her. She sat in her chair again, the pistol lying in her lap beneath her hands.

"Do you happen to have a photograph of Mr. Fleming?" he asked.

"Of Rufe? No. I'm sorry."

"Not even a snapshot?"

"Not even that. It's rather strange, isn't it, when you come to think about it? Neither Alex nor Rufe were much for having their pictures taken."

"Perhaps you could describe him to me."

"Why?"

"Oh, just in case I happen to see him or something. It might save me some time and trouble."

"Well, he's quite tall. About six-three, I'd say. Rather thin, but quite strong. He has a long face with thick eyebrows that grow across the bridge of his nose and black hair that's wiry and doesn't stay brushed very well. His shoulders are somewhat stooped, and I keep telling him to pull them back, but it doesn't do any good. I think he stoops deliberately to avoid appearing as tall as he is, especially when he's with me. As you can see, I'm rather small."

"Yes. I see." Marcus stood up, holding his hat, and looked around the room. An open entrance to a small kitchen. A door closed upon what must be a bedroom. Off the bedroom, certainly, a bath. No different, basically, from

the place shared by Gray and Fleming. "Tell me," he said. "Can you think of anyone at all who might have wanted to kill Alexander Gray?"

"No. No one. Surely it must have been some kind of accident."

"He was in no trouble that you knew of?"

"None. If Alex had any trouble, it must have been minor."

"I see. Well, thank you very much, Miss Shore. If you see Mr. Fleming, please have him contact me at police headquarters."

She followed him to the door and showed him out; the last thing he saw was her grave face and darkened eyes as the door closed between them. It was now well past time for lunch, and so he went and had a steak sandwich at a small restaurant and went on from there to headquarters, where he read a brief report from the coroner as to the estimated time of Alexander Gray's death, which estimate was, as Marcus had predicted, not much different from Marcus's guess. The coroner thought that Gray had been killed by a .22 caliber bullet, but there had been no time as yet to recover it from the body, due to an accumulation of work, and an autopsy was promised as soon as possible.

Marcus carried the pair of matched pistols to ballistics and left them with instructions for tests, and then returned to his desk and began to clear up some paper work, including his own report of the Gray case. He tried three times without success, during the rest of the afternoon, to reach Fleming at his apartment, and he kept thinking that Fleming might call in, but he didn't. Late in the afternoon, Fuller came in and reported on what had happened at the golf course after Marcus had left, but it didn't amount to much.

Alone, Marcus rocked back in his chair and closed his eyes and tried to think. He thought mostly about Sandra Shore. He still had difficulty in convincing himself that she was real, and he wondered if she was truly so remarkably self-contained as she had appeared, or if she had only found it impossible to express more effectively her shock and surprise at news that was really no news at all. Had she in fact known that Alexander Gray was dead before Marcus had arrived to tell her so? Marcus wondered, but he didn't know.

He sat there thinking for a long time, not really getting anywhere, and then he tried Fleming's apartment again without any luck. He decided to go out and eat and go home, and that's what he did. In his bachelor's apartment, he read

for awhile and had three highballs, bourbon and branch, and listened, the last thing before going to bed, to a Toscanini recording of Beethoven's Sixth. The next morning, which was the morning of Sunday, he got up early and drank two cups of coffee and went back to headquarters, and he was at his desk there when Fuller, reluctantly on duty, brought in a young man to see him. The young man, according to Fuller, had something to say about the Gray case, now public knowledge, that might or might not be significant. The young man's name, said Fuller, was Herbert Richards.

"Sit down and tell me what you know," Marcus said.

"Well," said Herbert Richards, sitting, "I was driving out there yesterday morning on the street just east of the Golf Club where this guy was killed, and my old clunker quit running all of a sudden. I've been working on a construction job, and I was on my way to meet some of the crew at a place in town. We were going on together in one of the trucks, you see. Anyhow, my clunker quit, and I had to hurry terribly to make it on time, walking, and so I cut across the corner of the golf course, walking in a kind of gulley that runs diagonally across the corner, and all of a sudden I heard shots."

"Wait a minute," Marcus said. "Did you say *shots?*"

"Yes, sir. Two of them. I read about the murder in the paper last night, and it said this guy was only shot once, so I wondered if I could have been mistaken, but I've thought about it, and I'm sure I'm not. They came so close together that they did sound almost like one shot, but I'm sure there were two."

"What did you do when you heard the shots?"

"Nothing. Just kept on going down the gulley."

"Didn't it occur to you that something might be wrong?"

"Why should it? I've heard lots of shots in my life, or sounds like shots. This is the first time it ever turned out to be someone getting murdered."

Marcus conceded the validity of the point. Honest folk going about their business just didn't jump to the conclusion of murder at every unusual sight or sound, even the sound of shots.

"What time was this?" he said.

"That's mostly what I wanted to tell you. It was just daylight. Just after dawn. I know it's important to know the time something like this happens, and that's why I came down here."

"I'm glad you did."

"You think it may help?"

"I think so. Thanks. If you don't

have anything else to tell me, you can go now."

Herbert Richards left, visibly pleased, and Marcus closed his eyes and thought for a moment about the scene of Alexander Gray's murder. Opening them again, he looked for Fuller, who was waiting.

"Fuller," he said, "you remember that high bank we went down about twenty yards or so from where Gray was lying? You take a couple of men and go out there and dig around in it and see if you can find a bullet."

Fuller, who resented the assignment, betrayed his feelings. Marcus, who marked the resentment, did not.

"Who cares if one bullet missed?" Fuller said. "We got the one in Gray, soon as the coroner digs it out this morning, and that's all we need. Besides, from the position of his body, Gray was facing the bank; the killer wasn't. Any bullet that missed him would have gone in the opposite direction."

"Go dig around anyhow," Marcus said. "It doesn't do any harm to be thorough."

Fuller gone, Marcus assumed his favorite position for thinking, chair rocked back, eyes closed, fingers laced above his belly. He thought this time about several things in a rather fantastic pattern. He thought about Alexander Gray and Rufus Fleming and Sandra Shore in an emotional triangle so crazy that it could certainly have been sustained only by a trio who were themselves a little crazy. He thought about Alexander Gray lying on a golf course. He thought about a brown worsted jacket lying on the grass about five paces from Gray's body. He thought about Herbert Richards, a construction worker in the act of trespassing, hearing two shots fired so closely together that they were barely distinguishable from one. He thought about a matched pair of target pistols placed in accidental symbolism below a reproduction of Daumier's *Don Quixote*. He thought about a cabinet above a lavatory in which there was only one razor and one toothbrush.

I don't believe it, he thought. *By God, I simply don't believe it.*

After awhile, he went to ballistics and got a report, but still lacked the specific comparison he needed, which waited upon the coroner. In his car, he drove slowly, with an odd feeling of reluctance, to Sandra Shore's apartment building. He rang her bell and waited and was about to ring it again when she opened the door. Her eyes widened a little in the faintest expression of surprise, recovering almost immediately their

grave, characteristic composure.

"Good morning," he said.

"Good morning," she said. "Do you want to come in again?"

"If you don't mind."

"I do mind, rather, to tell the truth, but I suppose I must let you."

"Thank you. I'll try to be brief."

They sat as they had yesterday, in the same chairs, and he was silent for awhile, looking down at the hat in his hands and wondering how to begin. Then he looked up at Sandra Shore, at the grave eyes in the serene heart, and let his own eyes slip away and fix themselves deliberately on the door closed upon her bedroom.

"May I go into your bedroom, Miss Shore?" he said.

"No. Certainly not." She sat very still, watching him until his eyes returned to her, and then her small breasts rose and fell slowly on a drawn breath and a sigh. "Well," she said, "I see you have been as clever as I was afraid you would be, but I'm glad, really, quite glad, because he seems to be getting worse instead of better, and I have been afraid he would die in spite of everything I could do. It was impossible to get a doctor, you see, and so I took out the bullet myself, but he seems to be getting worse, as I said, and I've been wondering what I should do."

"Did you also return the pistols to the apartment and pick up a razor and toothbrush while you were there?"

"Yes. How *very* clever you are! Alex and Rufe simply decided between them what they must finally do, the way to settle matters for good and all, and so they walked out there to the golf course together, which was the handiest place where it could be done, and it might have turned out all right for Rufe, although not for Alex, except that he got hit, too, in the shoulder, and that made everything much more difficult. He had to go somewhere, of course, and so he came here, and I helped him. He had the pistols, and I thought the best thing to do was to clean them and oil them and take them back to the apartment, and that's what I did."

"It was a mistake. Surely you know we can match the bullet in Alexander Gray with one of those pistols."

"That's true, isn't it? I suppose I didn't think of it at the time because I was upset and not thinking clearly about anything. It's odd, isn't it? I wanted so much to help Rufe, and I tried, but I guess I only did him harm instead."

"The fools! The crazy fools!" Marcus spoke with low-key intensity, slapping a knee. "Why the

hell couldn't they have drawn high card for you or something?"

"Oh, no!" She stared at him with scorn, as if he had betrayed himself as a sordid sort of fellow with no discernible sense of honor. "Alex and Rufe would never have treated me so cheaply."

"Excuse me," he said bitterly. "I concede that you've done your best for Rufe, whom you love, but what about dear Alex, whom you loved equally and who is unfortunately dead as a rather irrational consequence?"

"If it had turned out the other way around," she said, "I'd have done as much for Alex."

"I see." He stood up, his bitterness a taste on his tongue that he wanted to spit out on the floor. "I'll call an ambulance, and then you and I can go downtown together."

He was at his desk doing nothing, when Fuller came in that afternoon.

"We dug all over that bank," Fuller said, "and there's no bullet in it."

"That's all right," Marcus said. "I know where it is. Or, at least, was."

"The hell you do! Maybe you wouldn't mind telling me."

"Not at all. It was in the shoulder of a fellow named Rufus Fleming. He and Gray had a duel out there yesterday morning. That's how Gray got killed."

"A *duel!*" Fuller's eyes bulged, and he was so certain that Marcus had gone off the deep end that he felt safe in saying so. "You're always talking about someone being nuts," he said, "but in my opinion you're the biggest nut of all."

Marcus was not offended. He closed his eyes and smiled bleakly.

Well, he thought, *it takes one to catch one.*

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