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MANHUNT

WORLD'S BEST SELLING CRIME-FICTION MAGAZINE

JULY, 1956

35 CENTS

A NEW SMASH STORY

"The Big Bite"

by

**CHARLES
WILLIAMS**

"You punk!" she screamed as he
reached for the wad of bills . . .
(See "D. O. A.")

Walter Papp

Also - JERRY SOHL • F. L. WALLACE
NORMAN STRUBER • JOE GRENZEBACK

EVERY STORY
NEW!

Cover by Walter Popp

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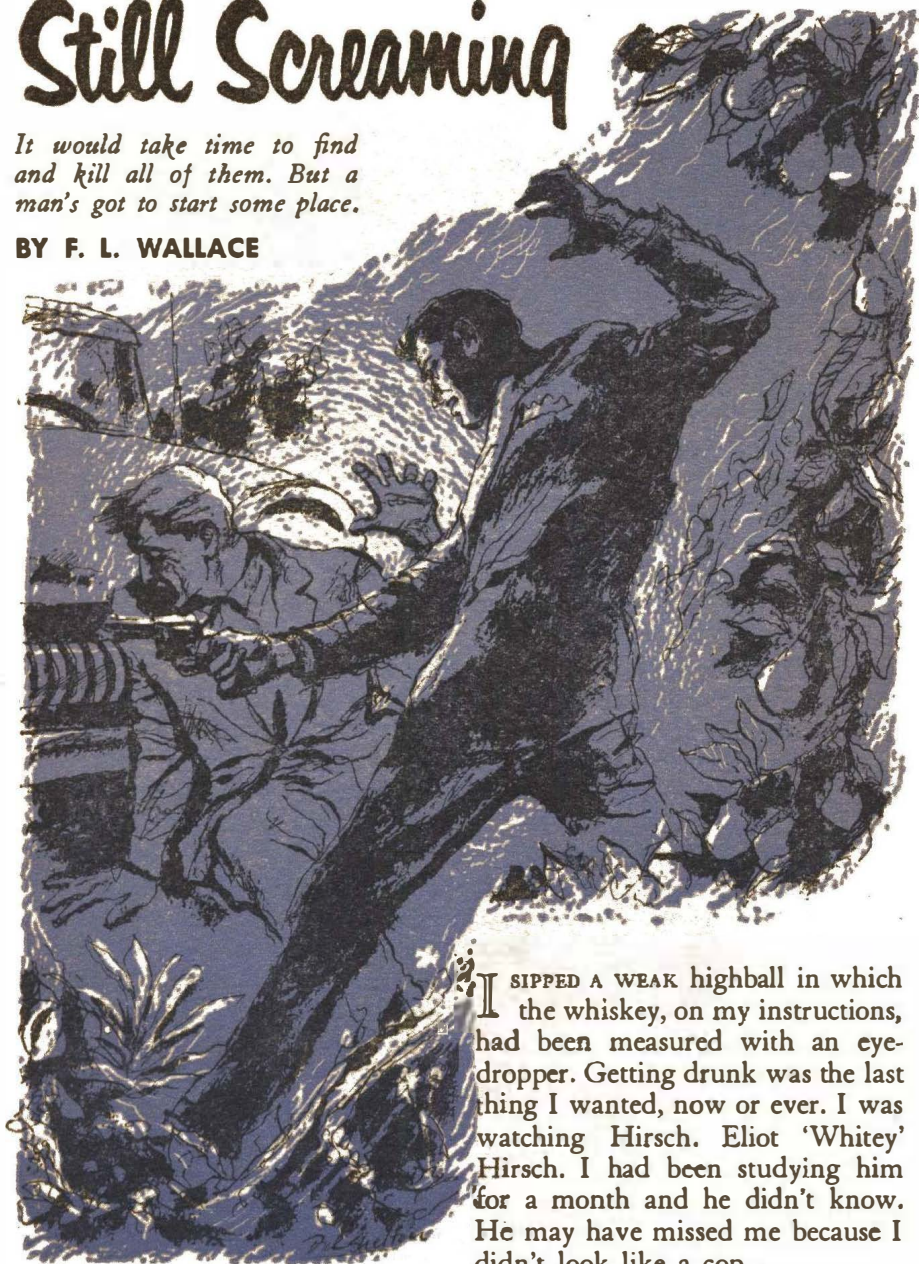
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Still Screaming

It would take time to find and kill all of them. But a man's got to start some place.

BY F. L. WALLACE



I SIPPED A WEAK highball in which the whiskey, on my instructions, had been measured with an eyedropper. Getting drunk was the last thing I wanted, now or ever. I was watching Hirsch. Eliot 'Whitey' Hirsch. I had been studying him for a month and he didn't know. He may have missed me because I didn't look like a cop.

I was sleepy but I wouldn't doze off. I couldn't. I'd straighten up with a jerk, come out of it with my eyes wide and staring. I had to get Hirsch and the others.

He had changed in a year. Then he had been a cheap callous punk of twenty-one. Now he was twenty-two.

For one thing his clothes were better. I got the idea he was laying off thrill jobs, leaving them for beginners. Now he was concentrating on profit. He looked prosperous.

He was handsome, if you were able to discount what was behind his face. His teeth were white and strong. I wondered what he sharpened them on. He was very blond and would have been even without help from the sun which had bleached his hair so that his brows were platinum against the tan and the sun-freckles beneath the tan. He was big and knew how to use his strength, but not where. He didn't deserve to live.

I had decided it three months ago. Nine months to make up my mind, two months to locate him, another month spent in making sure. I was sure now. Final confirmation would have to come from Hirsch himself. I didn't doubt that it would come.

For two hours he lingered with a group that suited him perfectly. Finally he got up and said something and the girls laughed, lowering their voices when the management looked that way. It was a nice safe place, the Commercial Cocktail

Lounge. During the day it was exclusive, serving executives from the surrounding factories and business establishments. But the executives had gone home to Pasadena and San Marino and Beverly Hills. Others were accepted conditionally, providing they observed the rules. Decorum was always preserved. No one felt much like arguing with the unofficial representatives of a billion dollar slice of industry.

Hirsch went to the bar and sat beside a man with whom he immediately began conversing. I hadn't counted on this complication. I looked the new man over carefully, deciding at last that he didn't matter. Older and leaner, there wasn't much to choose between the two. The coroner would take either and not complain.

Study paid off. Anticipating the next move, I paid for the drink and got out a full minute before they did. I waited near the entrance beside a big black Chrysler. There was a foundry next to the parking lot, a sheet metal building with dirty windows and incredible noise from the night shift. It was pour-off time and the smell of molten metal and baking sand mingled in the cool night air with the odor from packing plants. It was no wonder the cocktail lounge had air-conditioning.

They came out. I let them get beyond the car before going after them. They whirled at my footsteps, cocking their arms.

"Eliot Hirsch?" I said. "Whitey?"

They saw I had it on them, from inside my jacket pocket.

"That's me," he said. He was puzzled. There shouldn't be cops here, except the L. A. Traffic Patrol. Obviously I wasn't that.

I let him puzzle over it, giving him the shine off a badge I shouldn't be carrying. It would be easier if there was no commotion here. "I want to talk to you," I said. I jerked my head at the other man. "I don't need you, here or anywhere else. Get going before I take you along."

"What about my —" He stopped, his eyes flickering.

"What about what?" I said. "I'm giving you a chance. Better take it."

He didn't like it but he went away, cutting across the lot toward the foundry.

I nudged Hirsch over to my car. I unlocked it and slipped a cuff on his left wrist. "Get in."

Hirsch jerked loose and swung a left at me. The heavy cuff whistled past my head. It would have split my skull if it had landed. It didn't.

"Get in, Whitey!"

By this time I think he must have known but was hoping otherwise. He got in. I nuzzled the gun against him. "Bend down."

He leaned over. I looped the loose end of the cuff through the frame of the seat and snapped it on his free hand. I shut the door and got in the other side. I backed out and went up Sante Fe toward Washington. On Washington I turned east, heading out of the city.

Whitey was bent over, gunless, arms between his legs. He couldn't see where we were going. What was more to the point was that no one could see him unless they drove beside us and looked in for someone doubled over in the front seat.

"You're not a cop," he kept muttering. It didn't seem to improve his peace of mind.

"The things you don't know," I said. "Sure I'm a cop. My own."

I went out Washington to the dry San Gabriel river, turning south on a narrow dirt road that led to extensive avocado groves on the east bank. On the far side was a huge tract of newly built houses. Not many homes were occupied. The place was even more isolated at night than when I saw it during the day.

I drove into a grove, cutting around trees. I stopped the motor and switched to parking lights. Leaving Hirsch fastened I went back to the road and walked along it. Not a glimmer showed. I returned. He was struggling to get loose. He stopped as I came up.

I took out an electric lantern, turning on the top light. I set it on the ground and unlocked one hand, telling Hirsch to get loose and come out. He came out. I bent his arm behind him and took off the cuff. I didn't want him swinging metal around. Not yet.

"Sit down."

He looked around. "Where?"

"What do you want, a park bench? An upholstered chair? Get

in front of the car where I can see you."

He tried to run. I kicked his feet from under him. He started to get up. I jabbed him down with the gun. "In front of the car. Crawl there." He crawled through the thick carpet of dry leaves.

"Too bad about those slacks, and the shine on your shoes. And that nice jacket."

He didn't say anything. He was trying to see who I was, as if it made a difference. He hadn't noticed me in the bar and there wasn't much light in the parking lot. Not that I cared if he recognized me. I wanted him to keep on wondering. For once he was on the wrong end of uncertainty.

I let him sit there and twitch. In about ten minutes I took out a picture and tossed it to him. "Look at that."

He bent over, squinting in the light that glared into his eyes. Straightening up he said, "I never saw her."

He would have said the same if it had been a photograph of himself. "Look at it good," I said.

He stared at it again. "Some doll," he said.

It didn't help him to seem appreciative. She was nice but no more than that. If I ever criticized her, which I did often, it wasn't for her appearance. But neither did I spend much time beating movie scouts away from the door. "Anything else?" I asked him.

"I never saw her," he repeated.

"That's as she was before," I said. I took out another picture and sailed it to him. "This is after. Go over it carefully. I want your opinion."

He glanced at it, turning away at once. The fine tan he spent so much time on became mottled.

I leaned forward, redistributing his nose with the barrel of the gun. "I said, look at it. Keep on looking at it."

He rocked back, throwing his arm over his face. I smashed it down twice. He shook his head to clear his senses and when he could finally see, looked at the picture. He couldn't seem to stop. He moistened his lips, licking the blood that dribbled down from his nose. "This is bad," he whispered. "But why show it to me? I don't know anything about it."

"That's what you told the cops."

"They let me go."

"Lack of evidence. They've got to go by some rules when they turn you over to the D.A. I don't."

It was quiet in the grove. Nearby small wild creatures rustled in the trees. This passed unnoticed by Whitey. He had no time for stray sensations.

He shivered with the cold I didn't feel. I saw him tense to spring. The sitting position was against him. I waved the gun and his muscles quivered and collapsed.

"You're one of them. I found that out. What I want you to tell me is: who were the other four?"

He had thought it would never catch up with him again. He was limp and his throat was dry and he had difficulty speaking. "You got the wrong guy. I wouldn't do anything like that."

"Let's go over it and maybe you'll remember. The girl in an apartment across the street over a store saw five men run from the building and drive away before the police got there. You have a chance, not much but it's your only chance. Tell me who the others were."

He was witless and muscleless. I'd given him credit for more resistance. He was no good this way. All I could do was push him in as deep as he'd go, hoping he'd hit bottom. After that I might be able to pull something out of him.

"Nan wanted to live as much as you do now. She was sensible. She'd have known it was useless to struggle against so many. You could have raped her and let it go at that. She'd have gotten over it. But who was the bright son of a bitch that thought of cutting her open?"

He squirmed and tried to get up. He wouldn't have made it even if I hadn't turned the gun and batted him down. He lay there, holding his eye. "I can keep this up all night, longer than you did on her. You carved her for at least an hour and a half, screaming all the time."

Our apartment was nice, one of two apartments over the store. The rent was low and it was near work, which was why we'd taken it. Dur-

ing the day the street was fairly busy since it was in a commercial district. At night when the shops were closed it was deserted. The couple next to us were newly married, trying to economize. That was why they had no phone.

That night the girl's husband was working late as he often did. She was awake, watching for him out the window. She saw them grab Nan and when she heard the cries she knew what it was. She thought of running for the police. But a man stood guard on that empty building across the street. She had no desire to join the other woman.

When her husband came home she sent him for the police. But then it was too late. A few days later they moved away.

And now Hirsch was the only one I knew. The others were important too. They were the most important.

"I'm not mad at you, Whitey," I said. It was true. I sat there in wide-awake sleepiness looking at him as though he were something new under the microscope. "I don't believe in revenge. I don't think I have to kill you because you helped kill her. It's not that at all. It seems to me that you're not smart enough to figure out the surgery angle. Sure, you had guts enough to take yours when the others were holding her down. But you didn't think of it. I want to know who did."

There were signs that he was beginning to come up. He looked

at me with one good eye. The other was closed. He mumbled faintly. "I told you. I don't know anything about it."

"If I work on your throat will you promise to speak plainer?" He tried to scoot away, stopping when I wagged the gun.

"I've given up trying to understand people like you," I said. "I don't want to understand them. All I know is that I don't like them within a thousand miles of me, three thousand miles. I don't want them in the same world."

He said something I couldn't hear. "Speak up," I said.

"I can go away," he said.

"Certainly. But how? It takes money." I wondered if he would think this was a way out.

"I've got money. Fifteen hundred." He was eager.

"I thought you did. That's why your friend was worried. He wanted his share, of something. You crumbs!" I extended my hand. "I'll take it."

He fumbled with his wallet, cleaning it out. He opened it, anxious to show that he wasn't holding back. I left him fifty. "Keep that," I said. "Fold it and put it in your shoe." He looked at me as though I were doing him a good turn.

"It's not enough," I said.

"I can get more," he said. He was trying to be so helpful he was spilling over.

"This much I need. Hunting four guys takes all my time. I can't stop

to work. As for you, I hope you see that I've established robbery as the motive. Your billfold is empty and you've got fifty I overlooked."

His good eye began to cloud. I could see I was losing him. I was driving him away when I nearly had him. I had to get him back fast. Fear was in the way, the big deadly fear that comes once in a lifetime—at the end of it.

"Maybe it will help you talk if I tell you how I feel. This is something that has to be done for reasons you will never understand."

The gun was becoming heavy. Not the weight, but the almost living way the trigger kept pressing into my finger, coaxing it on. I shifted it to the other hand.

"I wasn't in love with Nan. That's the girl you did it to. She didn't love me, not any longer. That evening we'd had another quarrel and knew it was finished. We agreed on a divorce and set the date. That's why she went out and came back so late. Another thirty feet and she'd have reached the apartment. She couldn't run fast in heels."

He looked at me dully. "That's straight? You were going to get a divorce?"

"That's it exactly." My voice convinced him. I didn't have to lie with words or intonation.

"Another doll?"

"No. No one else, either for myself or her. We didn't get along, that's all. There was no use hanging on." I breathed slowly to quiet my-

self. "The trouble with you, Whitey, is that you and I don't think alike. Not in any way."

"You're a funny guy." He laughed shakily. "You know, I believe you."

"You can believe me. She meant nothing to me as a woman. But I still want to know the name of the guy who got the idea a knife was something to make love with."

"I wish I could tell you. I don't know. Curly brown hair, a big guy. Bigger than you."

Whitey might not be aware of it, but he was bigger than I. Taller and heavier, there wasn't much inside. Nothing. "Fine. But you haven't given me names. I've got to have them. How many of the gang did you know?"

He couldn't stop now if he wanted to. He didn't seem to want to. "Ralph Jensen and Joe Fredricks were with me," he said. "We met the other two guys around. They never did tell us who they were. Anyway we picked a car and started cruising. We followed some nice things but it was all risky. Then we saw this one, just starting to cross the street. We thought we'd have some fun so —"

"Never mind that," I said. "I'm sensitive. I've got the rest figured. Tell me about your pals."

He told me. When he got through I had it down. I could find those two and through them the others. They were all lined up.

"That's plenty," I said. "Get up." He got to his feet and I moved him

around with the gun. He stiffened as we went past the car.

"Where are we going?" he muttered as I prodded him out to the dirt road.

"Just a precaution," I said smoothly as we reached the bank. "I don't want you to get back to town before I do."

He wasn't sharp but ordinarily he would have seen through it. What threw him off was that I didn't fit with what he knew or had ever thought of. He was limited, limited too by the knowledge he didn't dare admit to himself. We went far down the dry river bed to a dense clump of brush where no one came, not even small boys with dogs.

"You know," he said as we walked, "I could let it slip to Ralph and Joe you're looking for them. But I'm not going to. The hell with them."

"That's wise," I said. We stopped. I looked him over, getting it just right.

"I'm thinking where I ought to go," he said, but he was uneasy now. "I never did like this city much anyway. Maybe I ought to head for New York."

I left him thinking about it through the echoes of the shot. He had perhaps an hour to give full consideration to the countless things he was never going to do. It gave me no satisfaction. I didn't expect any.

I went back to the car and drove away from Eliot 'Whitey' Hirsch.

Whitey had had names to bargain with and had held them as long as he could. I don't know why he thought that would get him out except he believed me. That was as it should be. I hadn't lied, but I hadn't told him everything.

Nan and I had quarreled and agreed on a divorce. The usual thing but this time we meant it. She'd gone out, saying she didn't know when she'd be back. And I stayed home. I stayed home with a bottle.

I drank myself into a stupor and went to sleep. That was the night I had to do it—dead drunk—out. I had snored through it all while the girl next door had banged on the door, while they were butchering Nan across the street.

I didn't hear a thing. Not that night I didn't. I had a gun in the house, and a phone. If at any time I had awakened . . . but I didn't.

I wonder if she'll finally stop screaming after I kill them all.



Circumstantial Evidence

Despite his explanation, authorities in Omaha, Neb., said they would file burglary charges against a suspect found behind the counter of a grocery with the store's money bag in his pocket. He was arrested by an officer who had heard the sound of breaking glass.

The suspect said somebody had crept behind him and shoved him through the store's plate glass window. He had fallen uninjured where the officer found him. Then somebody, either the person who pushed him or the officer, must have put the money sack in his pocket.

Skeptical Safecrackers

In Boston, the sign above the safe in the office of Builders Specialties Co. read: "Please do not open this safe as it contains less than \$50." Thieves ignored the sign and ripped open the safe. The loot amounted to \$256.

What's In A Name

A warrant issued recently in federal court at Hartford, Conn., for Alexander Zukowski was a lengthy document. Authorities said Zukowski had used 23 aliases during his 30 year criminal career.

They were enemies, these two cops. And then they were assigned to the city's deadliest manhunt, together . . .



Terminal

BY WILLIAM L. JACKSON

THE COMMUNICATIONS room was only one floor below the Homicide Squad room, and routine bulletins were walked up to Captain Short, leaving the phone free for urgent messages. The bulletin which a stenographer had just brought to the Captain's desk looked routine enough.

Short's blunt fingers drew the yel-

low slip toward him and he glanced up at Detectives O'Rourke and Anderson, as they entered the Squad room. They had both just reported for duty. Frowning, Short read evenly: "Inmate escaped from Bellevue Hospital. Clothed in hospital gown. Cars in area alerted. Description to follow."

The Captain shook his head with

experienced weariness. "When in doubt, Communications notifies Homicide. Friday night coming up, somebody probably being murdered at this very minute, and they send me general bulletins."

He dropped the yellow message and frowned again. "They'd better pick him up before the neighborhood around Bellevue hears about it, or they'll have the switchboard tied up all night."

Lieutenant Michael "Paddy" O'Rourke closed one Irish blue eye in sober contemplation. "He could be dangerous, a nut like that."

Detective Don Anderson smiled a slightly superior smile which opened both of O'Rourke's eyes. "All of 'em at Bellevue are dangerous. They're all nuts. It's just a matter of degree."

O'Rourke's blue eyes turned cool. "Oh, not *all*. Not quite. Some of 'em . . ."

"Forget it, Paddy," Captain Short interrupted. "He's needling you, as usual." He turned unsympathetic gray eyes toward Anderson. "It'll be a long enough night without you two fighting again. You'll have some other matters to keep you amused."

The phone on Short's desk jangled, and he lifted the instrument to his ear. With the Captain's attention thus drawn from them, Anderson and O'Rourke sized up each other as if they were strangers, though they had worked together on Short's squad for nearly two years.

At least daily they measured each other this way, and each time found less in common.

O'Rourke was a blocky, ruddy-cheeked man whose face escaped pure homeliness only because of his Irish eyes. He was a cop who had started on a foot beat, and the son of a cop whose father had been a cop. All that was good within him had been built the hard way, and Paddy knew it and was proud of it.

Don Anderson was blond, light-skinned, and equipped with wide-set, cynical gray eyes beneath a handsome forehead. He was a college-trained cop, with none of Paddy's calming experience of nights on a foot beat behind him. He was a lean man, in habit as well as stature, and reputed to be especially hard on drunks and streetwalkers, harder still on juveniles.

O'Rourke was the man to have patience with a drunk, or the one to understand a kid carrying a switch-blade. He was a cop who still received Christmas presents from folks on a beat he hadn't walked for five years. He would readily admit his faults and just as readily forget them.

Not so with Anderson. There was a hard core of pride within him which would allow no admission of softness, and his bone-deep toughness was as much a part of him as his cynical gray eyes. He was always quick to remember the times when toughness had saved his life.

Suddenly, Captain Short banged

down the phone and gained their attention again. "It's the lunatic again," he said. "He's Homicide's now. He got downtown somehow and broke into a sporting goods store. Stole a gun and used it to kill the shopkeeper. Picked up some hunting pants and a jacket and left. They're dispatching cars now, trying to seal off the area. Fifteenth Street over near Eighth Avenue. He hasn't got a car yet, as far as they know."

Paddy O'Rourke nodded at the communications flimsy on Short's desk. "Can we get a description from Communications?"

Short nodded. "They gave it to me on the phone. He's five-ten, weighs one-sixty, has brown hair and gray eyes. Medium beard, no unusual markings. Mr. Average Man, as usual. Except that his name is John Bemis. You've heard that before."

O'Rourke nodded, and Don Anderson said, "Oh, brother."

They knew that outwardly John Bemis would appear no different from hundreds of other citizens. He was a college graduate, an engineer, and an honorably discharged Army officer with an outstanding war record. Yet, two weeks ago he had herded seven people in his neighborhood into a small shop, and would have killed every one of them if his German pistol hadn't jammed. The people involved had been picked at random from the street; he had threatened them only because he be-

lieved that all of his society had turned against him.

"You want us to get down there?" Anderson said.

Short shook his head. "I don't know. Hold on a minute." He crossed the room and pulled out a file drawer, rifling through it until he found a particular manila folder. "Here it is," he said. "Bemis lives at fourteen-oh-four West Twenty-first Street. Six blocks from the killing. There's a chance he's headed for home. You two go to his place and look around. By the time you're through there, we'll be through with the other area."

Anderson and O'Rourke rose, and Short said, "Watch yourselves—and stick together."

They shared the same unmarked department car, and tonight was Anderson's turn at the wheel. He spun the car away from the curb and swore. "Now it's nuts. We're hunting nuts now."

"We'll get him," O'Rourke said.

"Sure we will," Anderson replied. "But when?"

O'Rourke pursed his lips. "I think tonight."

Anderson's voice was suddenly inviting. "Bet on it?"

O'Rourke shook his head. "Not on this."

Anderson shook his head in mock sadness. "Sure, and it's like an Irishman to quit when he's ahead."

"I said I won't bet," Paddy said evenly. "Make anything you want to out of it, Anderson."

The betting between them was an offshoot of the arguments into which Anderson so often prodded Paddy. They bet on court cases, the weather, ball games, fights, almost anything. It had started harmlessly enough, but somewhere along the way it had changed to a form of expression just short of violence, as if winning proved one man better than the other. Small stakes had been made large by the feelings never far from the surface between them.

Only last night they had bet a hat on the outcome of a prize fight. Not a new hat, but the hat worn by the loser. Anderson's blue snap-brim felt did not fit Paddy well at all.

Anderson looked sideways at Paddy and fell silent. After several wordless blocks, he swung the police cruiser onto Twenty-first Street. "It's fourteen-oh-four, isn't it?"

Paddy nodded. "The four story apartment. Better park next door."

Anderson eased the cruiser to the curb, and Paddy stepped out. "There's an alley behind this place that runs the whole block," Anderson said. "We ought to cover it if we can. You . . ."

His words were cut short by the sudden screech of tires spinning on concrete behind the apartment building. Paddy stepped away from the car to look between the buildings toward the alley, and Anderson jumped the cruiser ahead in time to see a large blue car picking up speed behind the apartment house.

His feet moved automatically on the floor pedals, and the cruiser leapt away from the curb. He yelled, "I'll get him!" and Paddy's mouth opened in frustration as he lunged for the door handle and missed.

He saw Paddy in the rear view mirror, standing spraddle-legged in the street, and then his attention turned back to the blue car as it shot out of the alley. He forgot about O'Rourke and slammed his foot down on the accelerator.

The blue sedan was half a block ahead, then a block, and Anderson swore and kicked harder at the accelerator. For two blocks he lost ground, and then the blue car slowed for a stoplight. Anderson kicked a last burst of speed from the police car and cut in sharply, his right front fender blocking the sedan. He ducked low as he left the car, slipping his service revolver from beneath his coat.

He jumped into the other driver's sight, and nearly dropped his gun in his haste to remove tension from its trigger. Behind the wheel of the blue sedan sat a wide-eyed, white faced boy who couldn't have been over seventeen.

"What were you trying to do!" Anderson shouted.

"I thought you were a buddy of mine," the boy stammered. He looked ready to cry, and Anderson realized that he was still waving his gun. He jammed the revolver back into its holster and fumbled in his coat for a pencil and paper.

A kid's race, he thought. *Of all the . . .* "What's your name? Who owns the car? Where do you live?"

The youngster stammered his answers, and Anderson jotted them down. "You'll be hearing about this," he said. "Now get out of here, and take it easy." He stamped back to the police car and slid behind the wheel. Then, through his anger, he remembered Paddy O'Rourke. He threw the cruiser into reverse and spun it around in the street.

When he reached Twenty-first Street again his watch told him it was five, and soon it would be dark. Paddy was nowhere in sight. A sudden sick apprehension shook him as he hurried from the car to the lobby of the apartment house. Inside, he took his gun from beneath his coat again, and swung its barrel along the row of brass mailboxes until he caught the name Bemis and the number 304. He left the foyer with the gun still in his hand.

This was all wrong, he thought. O'Rourke must have come in alone and gone upstairs, probably to check Bemis' quarters, thinking he was gone. But Bemis hadn't been gone, or Paddy would have been back by now. Bemis had been here. A feeling starting in the short hairs on Anderson's neck made him sure of this.

It's all wrong, he thought. *You left him, and maybe he's had it, alone.* The stairway was to his left, carpeted and empty, the self-service

elevator to his right. The indicator above the elevator rested on Three. He chose the stairs, moving quietly, but fast,

He walked softly up the last flight, looking both ways along the empty corridor before he spun silently off the wall into the middle of the hall. The door to 304 was open, a light on inside.

Before he entered, he somehow knew he would find no one inside. He looked quickly about the unrumped living room, and had his quick look at the bedroom and bath. On his way to the kitchen he was stopped by the unmistakable sound of a shot from somewhere above him in the building.

His mind hung on dead center for a moment, and then he said, "Paddy! Damn!" Again, viciously, "Damn!"

He ran into the hall and past the elevator. The indicator now rested on "R". Why hadn't he noticed the moving dial when he'd been in the hall? He had missed them by seconds. Again, unconsciously, he said, "Paddy!" and started upstairs to the roof.

When he cracked the metal door at the head of the stairs he saw that it was now almost dark outside. The graveled roof shone palely in the reflected lights of the city, and a tangle of television antennas cast a web of shadows across the gray surface. Nothing entered his line of vision, and he slid outside slowly.

Near one of the building's two

chimneys his eye caught the paleness of human flesh, and his gun came up and pointed. There was no answering movement, and he realized sickly that he was looking at a man's bare leg. Behind him, he heard the sound of a heel on iron, and whirled to see the spidery outline of a fire escape which hooked over the low wall about the roof.

He reached this metal outline and was thrown back from the edge of the roof by a sudden flash from the ground. The shot was fired from four floors below, but the bullet screamed off concrete a foot from his face, and it seemed as if the gun had gone off squarely before his eyes. A figure moved in the shrubs near the building, and he fired twice at it. His bullets thudded harmlessly into the ground, and the running man passed from sight around a corner of the building.

Anderson swore helplessly and recrossed the roof to the chimney. He knew what he would find there, but the knowledge did not lessen the shock. He said, "Paddy!" and didn't feel the gravel roof cutting into his knees as he knelt beside O'Rourke.

He saw where the bullet had entered, but still felt for a pulse, as if his hand on O'Rourke's wrist could somehow bring life back to him. The Irishman's topcoat and suit were gone, and his nakedness was suddenly something pitiless and obscene. Anderson took off his own coat and tucked it about Paddy's

legs. He stood up, and with Paddy dead before him he could find no thought which offered him comfort.

He thought of Paddy's pretty blonde wife, and the boy with Paddy's chin and blue eyes. He thought of Paddy worrying about a kid picked up on a burglary charge; mad clear through at a hoodlum brought in for peddling heroin; and making excuses for a whiskey-reeking panhandler. He thought of Paddy doing too many things which he had never done himself.

He said, "Oh, Paddy," and knelt again, his lips trembling, the tears coming as they had not come since he was a boy. He rose, bit his lips, and stamped across the roof to the stairway.

He pounded on the first door he came to on the top floor, and shouted, "Police! I need a phone." The door opened, and a man still wiping dinner from his lips pointed wide-eyed to his telephone and stepped aside.

It took a few minutes for a line through headquarters to Short's car, and then Anderson heard the Captain's voice on the wire. He jerked out his story in short sentences, without attempting to spare himself, and tried to answer Short's rapid-fire questions. "Yes, he got away. I don't know which way; I was thinking of Paddy. Yes, Captain, I shot at him. Captain, I said he killed Paddy. Yes, took his clothes. O'Rourke must have caught him in his apartment before he could get the clothes he

was after. Brown gabardine suit and a gray topcoat. He must have relatives. Maybe he'll try to reach them. Better have somebody cover that angle."

Short's voice came over the wire again, and anger and shame blurred the Captain's words in his ear. He knew Short must be alone in a patrol car to talk like this. Anderson's shoulders sagged. It had to be said by someone; it was what the whole department would be thinking soon enough. There would have to be a way for them to express the loss which would be felt by each of them, the bitterness which would wipe out a lot of friendships. Nevertheless, it had to be answered.

Anderson bent forward, his hands white on the phone, his voice flat. "I'll write the kid a ticket, all right," he said, "but I won't enjoy it. And I won't take talk like this from anybody again, including you, Captain. Is that understood?" He stopped to catch his breath, and the anger and frustration which had started on the roof took control of him. "Now, are we going to talk all night, or are you going to get some men out here? Damn it, Captain, let's put some wheels in motion."

Physically trembling, he slammed the phone back on its hook and whirled about, roughly herding the apartment owner before him into the hall, moved by a rage and urgency which was near panic. "Now, I want you to stand right here," he said, "and don't let anybody up on

the roof unless he identifies himself as a police officer. Understand?" He left the frightened, numbly nodding man before the steel door to the roof and spun down the hall, ignoring the elevator for the stairs.

Outside the building, he raced to the prowler car, slipped in, and turned on the radio. He tasted his heart in his throat as he saw the keys dangling from the ignition. His thoughts flashed back to the moments he had spent over Paddy on the apartment house roof. No, he had heard no car start after he had fired and the madman had disappeared around the corner of the building. Bemis was still on foot, but it was pure luck that he wasn't racing away in a police prowler car.

The radio warmed up and gave him nothing but a dull buzz which told him Short was putting things in motion now. Routine calls were cleared from the air, and every car in the city was waiting for instructions to continue the search which had started with his phone call to the Captain.

Urgency again gripped Anderson. They could wait until Bemis was gone if he was smart enough to realize they had nothing to go on but a brown suit and gray topcoat. Anderson watched his hands begin to tremble and tightened them on the steering wheel. Where would he go, presumably on foot or in a bus or taxi? He'd be looking for a way out of the city—but what way?

A bus would be too slow to make

sense. By the time he reached a highway, roadblocks would be up. This took care of the car angle, too. The airport? On a Friday night? Without luggage? It would be tough to catch a plane within the hour without previous arrangements. Grand Central station? Where else could Mr. Average Man lose himself more easily?

It was a hunch, no more. And this was where Anderson himself would have gone. A place where there were cross-continent trains, interstate trains, commuter trains, dozens of strings of crowded cars leaving the city every hour. Anderson shoved the prowl car into gear and left the curb. He had to be moving, looking, even if it was strictly a hunch. Short would have a fit when they didn't find him at the scene of Paddy's death, but he couldn't really tell them any more than he had given the Captain on the phone.

He took the most direct route uptown, his mind so crowded that he forgot his siren at stoplights. He was within a few blocks of Grand Central when the radio crackled.

"All cars . . ." a flat voice came in, and Anderson's hands coated the wheel with perspiration as he caught the entire announcement. Bemis was now in the midtown area. He had gotten into a cab a few blocks from his apartment and given the cabbie an east side address. On the way they had passed a parked prowl car and Bemis told the cabbie to turn around. The cabbie had asked

him to make up his mind, and Bemis had slugged him and jumped out about three blocks from Grand Central.

Anderson's lips flattened into a thin pale line. There would be a thousand people milling around the station at this hour. It would be a miracle if they could get to him before somebody upset him again.

He made the rest of the trip to the station without seeing another patrol car, and stopped a block from the main entrance. He let the crowd pouring in off the street sweep him along into the terminal, and once inside felt a familiar and overwhelming sense of smallness. The station ceiling was four stories high, and the two floors of the building were connected by a thirty foot wide set of marble stairs. He remembered reading somewhere of the fantastic number of passengers the terminal accommodated during rush hours, and wondered hopelessly how many people were here now.

And how many of them would be wearing gray topcoats and brown pants? How would he know Bemis if he saw him? He walked casually through the crowd, seeing every person he passed, but trying to keep his eyes from studying any one. He saw a gray topcoat and a pair of brown pants in front of the newsstand and started that way. The man turned around. He was colored.

He continued toward the newsstand, toward another gray topcoat and brown trousers which had just

bought a paper. This man was the right build, the right size. He looked toward Anderson and put one hand in his coat pocket, and Anderson fought an impulse to reach inside his coat. The stranger shrugged and pulled a crumpled pack of cigarettes from his coat pocket. He rolled a cigarette across his lips, and Anderson had the look he needed. There was no gun on him.

He passed a line of commuters before a ticket window and counted three men in gray topcoats and brown trousers, all too heavy. Another line held two of this combination, and one of these brought Anderson into the line, until he got close enough to see the man's red hair beneath his hat.

He passed the ticket windows and went upstairs to the second deck. When he looked back toward the lower floor it seemed as if half the men he could see were brown and gray. He saw the legs of a man dozing on a bench, and thought of Paddy. Some nagging thought tugged at a reluctant drawer in his memory, and his neck prickled as it had when he had found Paddy on the roof. *What's eating you?* he thought. *Have you got something? What is it?*

He shook his head. Try to think while you're watching several hundred moving people. See a gray topcoat, look at the legs beneath it. Multiply the number of people by two, and you'll have the number of legs. Divide by two, and you'll

come up with the number of pairs of trousers. Stop it! He's here somewhere. Find him.

The thought he was searching for came to the surface now, sudden and unexpected, and he cursed himself for a fool. A terrible excitement trembled in his chest, and he quickly cast his glance through the ranks of moving people again. The tremor in his chest ran out into his hands, and he started back down the stairs.

There was his man! Coming out of the washroom, walking by a row of luggage lockers. Walking toward the rear street entrance!

Anderson started across the station, lifting his head above the crowd, looking briefly toward the doors in and out of the place. Now they were coming in, from almost every entrance. Some of them he recognized as friends, others only by something which gave them away to his trained eye. He counted six in fewer seconds, all plainclothes men. Short had been smart enough not to let a uniformed cop inside. They were searching the crowd now as he had searched it, quietly, competently, and inconspicuously.

Now he saw Short himself, a heavy, tired-looking man who might have been wondering if his train was on time. Anderson lifted his hand above his head and watched Short's head swing his way immediately.

Anderson nodded sharply and watched the Captain start to drift

toward him through the crowd. He saw Bemis push through the swinging door which led to the outside cab stands, and followed him. He looked back over his shoulder, and saw Short casually elbow another policeman and bring this fellow through the crowd with him.

He went through the outside door behind Bemis, and stood for a moment beneath the long overhang covering a dozen cab stands. He saw people standing in line for taxis, and for a frantic instant thought that Bemis was gone. Then he saw him halfway along the platform, fourth in line behind one of the yellow tin cab signs.

He heard the swinging door swish behind him, and knew that Short and the other man were on the platform. He moved along, past a dozen people waiting for cabs with no knowledge that an armed madman stood in their midst. Anderson thought of these people, and walked past John Bemis, sensing the madman's eyes upon him as he passed. From the corner of his eye he saw Bemis' hands jammed deep into his coat pockets—Paddy's coat pockets.

Anderson took five more paces and whirled about. "Bemis!" he shouted. "I'm going to get you!" He dug under his coat with his right hand, and watched Bemis' coat pocket lift and point at him.

He saw Short's heavy figure closing in behind Bemis, and when he thought the split-moment of time

had come he threw himself flat on the concrete platform. He heard the crash of the madman's shot, heard it sing by and smash into the wall above him, and then dared to look up.

Short had one thick arm about the madman's neck, his other hand clamped upon the smouldering cloth about Bemis' pocket. The detective with the Capain grabbed Bemis' wrist, did something fast with his hands, and stepped away with the madman's gun. In the struggle, Bemis' coat came off his shoulders and his hat fell to the walk.

Anderson got to his feet, seeing Bemis twist in the Captain's grasp, his eyes rolling with helpless fright. Then, as suddenly, the madman stopped struggling, dropped his head on his chest, and began to cry. Short released him, and the other policeman handcuffed him. He resisted no more, and continued to cry. Short shook his head, his face gray, finally looking away from the weeping man beside him. His eyes softened as he looked at Anderson.

"That was nice," he said. "Paddy would have liked what you did for the people here."

Anderson nodded and stepped forward. He bent and picked up the light blue hat which had fallen from the madman's head. He brushed it off and held it almost tenderly, and Captain Short nodded in recognition. "So that's how?"

Anderson gestured meaninglessly. "Just last night he won it from me. I should have remembered it sooner." He looked at Bemis' writhing hands and grief-twisted face, and suddenly felt an anger which was an actual pain within him. He closed his eyes and shook his head.

"Get away from him, Don," Short said. "You've had enough."

Anderson nodded numbly and turned away, walking stiff legged back into the station, trying to put it all behind him. He walked alone within himself, sure there was nothing he could do, nothing to

bring Paddy back. He saw people passing by as if nothing had happened, and silently damned each of them.

He knew they would never know how lucky they were, and as suddenly knew that there *was* something he could do. One thing. He could pass Paddy along to them. Through himself and the Irishman's son. He could tell the boy and make him understand. It wouldn't be easy with the mother knowing how Paddy had felt about Don Anderson. But he could do it. He would have to do it.



Insult To Injury

Richard Rich, manager of a parking lot in Memphis, Tenn., said that three men not only tried to charge him for parking on his own lot, but tried to overcharge him.

Testifying in court, Rich said the men, who were fined for usurping control of the lot while the manager was away, tried to charge him 50 cents when he drove into the lot. The regular charge is 35 cents.

Road To Recovery

Kang Woo Won, a murder suspect, escaped from jail at Taegu, South Korea. Two weeks later he sent a letter to the Taegu prosecutor apologizing for his action. "I wasn't feeling too well," the letter read, "because I feared I would be executed. But I am very well now, thank you."

TWO MONTHS ago if he'd told any of the old gang that he wanted to cut out and get home so he could do his homework, they'd have thought he turned loco, lost his marbles, they'd have laughed him clean out of the neighborhood. Two months ago he, too, would have thought he was flipping his lid if he'd found himself looking upon schoolwork as anything more than a pain in the right breast. But things were different now. The old neighborhood, the gang, the cops, they were all things of the past. And he was glad his mother and father had decided to pack up and move from the city when they had, and he was grateful to them, and he wanted to show them he had ambition to be somebody, that he appreciated all they were doing for him.

He smiled with satisfaction now

BY NORMAN STRUBER



Pal With a Switchblade

Luis and Danny talked and talked. Came to an alley. And then there was no talk at all.

and began to whistle softly as he adjusted the schoolbooks he was holding and started down the steps of the six-month old high school building.

He stopped suddenly as he crossed an expanse of lawn speckled with autumn leaves, his eyes catching sight of the young man leaning against the fender of a car parked up ahead. He looked at him and felt a sudden chill stab through his spine despite the fact that he was wearing a heavy woolen jacket, and he did not want to believe that the small, dark-haired youth casually smoking a cigarette and eyeing him steadily was Luis Anaya. He gaped at the black leather jacket with its brass zippers and shiny snap fasteners, and then his gaze shifted back to the taut expression on the bony, acne-scarred face. Warily he shifted his school books to his left hand. And he asked himself, what the hell is Luis doing way out here?

All at once a thought flashed across his mind like a bomb burst, and he felt that he knew why Luis was there. It made him tremble a little. But that's silly, he thought. Christ, that's silly. I'm not in the gang anymore, not since we moved away. Those guys knew I wanted out, and I bet they were glad to get rid of me, too, just as glad as I was to shake them, get them off my back. He began walking again, staring hard, trying to tell himself that it wasn't really Luis at all, just

a guy that looked like Luis. Christ, lots of guys wear black leather . . .

It was Luis Anaya, all right.

He bit on his lower lip nervously. Hesitantly, he continued walking right up to Luis. His body felt weak, drained, as he stood there and watched Luis nonchalantly take a last, long pull on the cigarette and flip it away, pulling back his upper lip over gleaming white teeth and letting the smoke spill out in one thick stream. Luis did not move. He retained his slouched position, tilted his head to one side and looked up at him. Luis could make a guy nervous as hell with that look.

At last Danny's throat found voice, and he tried to hold it even, and casual.

"Hello, Luis."

Luis' dark eyes travelled the length of him, then finally fixed on his face again.

"Hiya, Danny boy," Luis answered, his voice high-pitched, almost like a girl's.

But it was a fooler, because hearing that voice, and seeing the size of him, a guy was tempted to get cocky and try to push Luis around, and that would be a big mistake. Lots of guys found that out, the hard way. Luis was a guy you couldn't finish off, short of killing him. It wasn't like pounding hell out of a guy in a street fight and that was the end of it. Not with Luis. He was fast and he was wiry as a panther, but he could be taken,

especially if a guy was strong and had a good solid punch, and was a good head taller than Luis, like Danny was. You could drop Luis, but he would come back. You could drop him again, and he would come back again. He would always come back. Maybe you could even walk away from the brawl with Luis sprawled on the street, his face all battered to hell, and thinking you'd shown this guy who was top man, but you'd be wrong. You'd be dead wrong because the fight was never over until Luis won. He carried his hatred for you around inside him like a vendetta, and he'd wait for you, patiently, until he thought the time was right and then he'd get you. He'd get you when you least expected it. That's what he enjoyed, getting you when you didn't know it was coming. And he'd get you just enough to let you know it was a big mistake you made messing with Luis Anaya, and you didn't go yelling to the cops, either, because you knew that Luis would always be waiting, and if you think you can beat a crazy hop-head like that go ahead and try it.

Danny was glad he'd never tangled with Luis.

"Nice to see you, Luis," he said, trying to make it sound genuine.

"Same here, Danny."

"Uh—what're you doing way out here?"

Luis smiled weirdly. "It's a free country, ain't it?"

"Sure. Sure," Danny said agreeably, wanting to stay on good terms, but also wanting to know what Luis was up to. He was damn sure Luis hadn't come just for a social visit. "I was just wondering, that's all. You coming all the way out here from the city . . ."

"I got lonesome. I said, 'Luis, it's time you went to see your good friend, Danny, in the country'." Luis paused, shrugging and spreading his hands before him. "And here I am."

Danny shifted his weight uneasily. "That's nice of you, Luis. Uh—how'd you know I was here, at the school?"

"Now, what kind of a question is that to ask?" Luis said, his face mocking a hurt expression. "I found out. Wanting to see you and all, I found out."

"You didn't go to my house, did you?"

"Say, what's eating you, anyway?"

"Nothing, why?"

"You look nervous."

"No. I ain't nervous."

"You sure?"

"'Course I'm sure. What's there to be nervous about?" Danny tried to shrug casually. "Just wondering how you found out where I was, you not knowing the neighborhood or any of the kids out here."

Luis straightened and dug his hands into the angular slash of his blue jeans pockets. "All right. If it bothers you so much. I went to

your house and your old lady told me you weren't home from school yet. So I asked a guy where the school was and he told me." Luis paused and cocked his head to one side. "What's the matter, you ashamed I went to your new house?"

"No. Of course not, Luis."

"Maybe you don't like the idea your old lady meeting one of your old buddies, huh?"

"Hell, no."

"You don't act so glad to see me."

"I'm glad to see you, Luis."

Luis grinned a little and pulled a package of cigarettes out of his pocket. "Nice joint you got there, Danny. Real nice." He extended the package to Danny and Danny took a cigarette, bending his face down to Luis' cupped hands and accepting the light. He hoped Luis hadn't seen the trembling of his hand.

"It's nothing fancy," Danny said, pulling the smoke deep into his lungs. "But it's better . . ."

"Better than those rat traps up-town, eh, Danny?"

"Anything'd be better than those dumps."

"Yeah. Sure. Guess you're glad to get away from the bums who live in those dumps, too, eh, Danny? Bums like me and . . ."

"I didn't say that, Luis."

Luis dragged on his cigarette and stared up at the good-looking blond kid, and Danny felt he saw hate, and resentment in those hard,

black eyes. Danny swallowed, and clenched his jaws, and bunched his jacket collar up around his neck.

"Your old man musta finally hit a winner, huh, Danny?"

"Huh?"

"The horses, I mean. He musta caught a bundle. Moving out here, and buying a house and all, that takes a lot of gold."

"No. No, he don't do that no more."

"No horses?" Luis said, his brows hiking abruptly. "You must be kidding."

"I ain't kidding."

"Jesus, next thing you'll be telling me he don't hit the bottle no more, neither."

"He don't. He give that up, too."

"Come on, what kind of snow job you trying to pull on me, anyway?"

"I ain't snowing you, Luis. I mean it."

"How'd your old man swing it then?" Luis asked sullenly. "He rob a bank or something?"

"He got a job in one of those factories that make parts for airplanes."

Luis laughed. "What the hell does *your* old man know about making airplanes?"

"You don't have to know about airplanes in order to work there."

"No? What's he do?"

"He has charge of the scrap aluminum. He collects it and—"

"A junkman, huh?"

"Well, no, not exactly—"

"If he's not a junkman then what's he doing collecting junk?"

"Well, he's in charge of—"

"King of the junk pile, right?"

"No, he—"

"Look, Danny, anybody who collects junk is a junkman, isn't he?"

"But he isn't that kind of—"

"What's the matter, you too high class to admit your old man's a junkman?"

"No, I—"

"Well, then don't talk in circles, Danny boy. Just come right out and say your old man's a junkman."

Danny thought, Jesus, what's he riding me for? What's he got against my old man? If the son of a bitch's trying to needle me, I've got to keep my head and just not get needled, that's all. Play it cool. Maybe I'm just nervous, about what happened and all. Sure. Maybe I am talking in circles. When you get right down to it, I guess my old man is a junkman, and I guess Luis is all confused, my telling him he collects scrap and then saying he's not a junkman.

Either that or he's trying to confuse me. Yeah. A slick tongue, this Luis. Got to play it cool. Can't afford to get confused.

"You're right, Luis," Danny said appeasingly, "my old man's a junkie. I never thought much about it before and I . . ."

"A junkie?" Luis said, his eyes widening abruptly, his face mimick-

ing astonishment. "I didn't know your old man was on the stuff, Danny."

"He isn't."

"But you just said he was a junkie."

"Yeah, but—"

"All right, so he's a junkie."

"That's not what I meant and you know it."

"I don't know what's the matter with you, Danny boy. You keep talking in circles. Say what you mean, boy."

"Cut it, Luis! You trying to get me sore or something?"

Luis narrowed his dark eyes, his lips drawing back tightly over his teeth. "Why? You getting sore, Danny? You getting sore at *me*, Danny?"

Hold it, Danny thought. Jesus, let's hold it. Let's not fly off the handle because that's obviously what he wants me to do. But why? Jesus, why? If he's got something on his mind, why don't he come right out and spill it? Why don't he stop breaking my back? He likes this cat and mouse stuff. He loves it. He just eats it up and I've got to keep my head.

"Nah, I'm not getting sore, Luis. I know you're just kidding." Danny quickly changed the subject. "How'd you come out, Luis, on the Long Island?"

"Why take one of those crummy trains when I've got myself a real good car?"

"Yeah? You really got a car?"

Luis pushed himself off the fender lithely. "Sure," he said, kicking the front tire. "Whitewalls, too. You like it?"

Danny looked at the black sedan, and he shuddered as he recognized it. He didn't say anything. He knew what the inside looked like, too, even though it was close to dark now, the sky a cold, dismal dark gray, and the windows of the car so dirty you couldn't see through them.

"You like it, Danny?" Luis repeated.

He nodded weakly.

"You recognize it, don't you, Danny? Sure. You've been in it enough times. You remember Valles' car, don't you? Pete Valles? You remember Pete Valles, too, don't you, Danny? It's been more than two months, but you couldn't forget good ole Pete, could you, Danny boy?"

"Look, Luis, it's getting late . . ."

"Only Pete don't need the car no more, Danny, so I bought it from his old lady. Pete don't need any car where he is. Up there they got crazy ideas that a guy don't need a car. They got bars and they got a big wall around the joint and they figure a guy don't need—"

"It's really late, Luis, and my mother—"

"'Course Pete's got company though, so I guess he don't get too lonesome. There's Tony Collingo, and Solly Aranoff, and Carlos . . ."

Danny looked down at the side-

walk, unable to hold Luis' gaze. He blinked his eyes as Luis rattled off the names, an aching lump swelling in the back of his throat.

". . . Chavez. Yeah, Pete's got company, all right. Four guys up for five years. Five guys gone, including you, Danny. But you ain't in no cage are you, Danny? You got a sweet set-up in the country, and you—"

"It—it's dark, Luis. I've got to be getting home."

Luis lighted another cigarette and shoved one at Danny, but this time Danny shook his head. "It won't be dark for a good half hour yet, Danny," Luis said, flicking his eyes up and down the street.

"All the same, my mother—"

"Come on, you're a big boy now, Danny. We used to stay out a hell of a lot later than this, didn't we?"

"Things have changed. My father gets home at seven now, and—and he don't like it when I'm not there."

"Okay," Luis said tersely, flipping his cigarette and stuffing his hands into his pockets again. He stood up close to the bigger boy, his eyes fixed squarely on Danny's. "I'll walk you."

It was an order. Luis hadn't shouted, or cursed, or looked particularly angry when he said it, but Danny knew it was an order. He didn't know how he could get out of it.

"Uh—what about the car?" Danny asked.

"What about it?"

"You going to leave it here?"

"Sure. Your place isn't far."

"I know, but . . ."

"Nobody's going to steal it, are they?"

"Well, no, but . . ."

"Nobody steals anything out here in the country, do they, Danny? Everybody's nice and they love each other and a guy'd rather be dead than steal anything, isn't that right, Danny?"

The bastard, he thought. The lousy bastard.

But he didn't want Luis to get started on one of those kicks again, so he didn't answer. Luis was going to walk him and that's all there was to it. Nothing short of physical violence was going to keep Luis from sticking with him until he was good and ready to leave. He could have told Luis to go to hell right there, and to stop bothering him and go back to where he belonged, maybe flatten him, too, with a couple of good solid punches. But Luis was an expert with the knife, and he was undoubtedly carrying it now. And even if he could stop Luis from using it, there was later to think about. Luis was the guy who never forgot, and what was the sense in starting something and afterwards being afraid to turn a corner, or go near a dark alley, for fear that this hot-headed bastard would be waiting for him with a switch knife?

Unless . . .

Unless he stopped Luis permanently. That was the only way to really be rid of Luis. Fix him good, once and—

No, he thought. Jesus, what am I thinking? That'd be worse, that'd be worse for everybody. And what the hell am I getting myself all worked up about anyway? Hell, you don't start fighting with a guy just because he wants to walk you home. Better to humor the guy, he reasoned, and let him get his beef off his chest, and maybe he'd go away friendly.

"Sure, Luis," Danny said, "Anything you say."

They began walking just as the street lights went on, and Danny saw Luis glance at the shiny, spun-aluminum lamp post and nod his head up and down in that funny gesture of his as if he were saying, "Slick stuff. Not bad. Not bad at all." Danny looked around anxiously as they walked, wondering where everybody was, and then he remembered that it was Friday night and all the guys had hurried home so they'd have time to get dressed up and pick up their dates for the school dance later that evening. He had to get dressed, too, and there was this cute chick, Sally, he was supposed to call for by seven-thirty, and he wished Luis'd get off his back and go home because he didn't want to be late. As they reached the corner, a husky kid about Danny's size came hurrying

ing along. He stopped when he saw Danny.

"Hi, Danny."

"Hello, Frank. See you at the dance?"

"No. I'm not going. I promised my Dad I'd give him a hand finish-ing off the attic tonight."

"We figure on starting ours in the spring."

"That's a good time to work on it. Pretty cold up there now," Frank said, eyeing Luis inquisitively.

"Oh," Danny said, "this is my friend Luis."

"Hi, Luis."

Luis nodded.

"Well, I've got to shove off, Danny. See you at football practice tomorrow."

"Okay, Frank."

"So long."

"So long, Frank," Danny said reluctantly, wanting to tell Frank to stick around because this guy Luis wasn't really his friend. Stick around, Frank, because this guy's a hop-head and he's great with the knife and I don't trust him one goddamn bit. But Frank was gone, and anyhow, he sure would have sounded like a jerk coming right out and saying a thing like that about a little guy like Luis. Frank would have thought he was nuts.

He felt peculiarly alone, and panicky inside.

"What's with this dance bit, Danny?"

"Huh?" Oh—the Fall Dance. Tonight. That's why I have to—"

"Any meat?"

"Well, I—I don't know these kids well enough, Luis. I mean, I've only been out here two months."

"What's the matter with you, Danny boy? You used to be able to size up a broad in nothing flat."

"Yeah," Danny laughed nervously. "I guess I've gone stale."

"Must be all this fresh air, huh?"

"Yeah. I guess so."

"Maybe I'll drop around."

"Huh?"

"To the dance, Danny. You know I always go for a shin-dig."

"Well, I don't know, Luis. You see, you have to have a ticket and a date, and—"

"Ticket? Hell, you know I don't buy any tickets, Danny."

"Well, the teachers'll be there and—"

"I ought be able to find me a date out of all those broads, huh?"

"Look, Luis, you can't go bargaining—"

"What's the matter, you think I ain't high class enough for this joint?"

"No, it ain't that, Luis. I—"

"Afraid I might embarrass you maybe, huh? You're fancy stuff now, and you think I might embarrass you. Ain't that right, Danny?"

"No, it's just—"

"Let's get a beer," Luis said, nodding his head toward a saloon crowded among a group of dilapidated-looking stores.

Danny sucked in a deep breath

and gripped his schoolbooks tightly. "Gee, I don't know, Luis," he said as they approached the dingy, cafe-curtained window. "They're kind of strict out here about selling to minors."

"By the looks of this dump, they ought to be glad to get a couple of customers."

"I wouldn't want to get into any trouble, Luis. Couldn't we get a coke? There's a candy store right over—"

"Coke? You kidding? Man, I swear I don't know what's got into you, Danny?" Luis reached for the doorknob. "Come on."

"Now, wait a minute, Luis—"

"Jesus, I come all the way out here to see my good friend, Danny, and he does nothing but insult me. Now I want to buy him a beer and he acts like I'm dirty, or something."

"Christ, Luis, why do you always—?"

"You too *clean* to have a beer with me, Danny?"

"No."

"Then come on."

Danny followed him inside. The interior of the old saloon was dimly lit and greasy-looking, and neither the bartender nor the two grimy construction workers hunched over the bar paid any particular attention to them as they walked to the back and sat down in a booth facing each other.

The bartender, a balding, stocky man, sauntered over after they

were seated, wiping his hands on an apron that looked long overdue for the laundry.

"Kind of young, aren't you boys?"

"You want to stand there and guess how old we are," Luis said, "or you going to do what you're here for and get us a couple of beers?"

"How old are you boys?"

"We just applied for social security, okay?"

"You look pretty young to me."

"That's 'cause we live a clean life. All this fresh air, you know."

"You've got spunk haven't you, wise guy?"

Luis sneered and slapped a dollar bill on the table. "I got money, too. Or maybe you want we should take our business elsewhere."

The bartender shrugged, and Danny was surprised when he picked up the dollar and brought the two beers and Luis' change without saying anything more.

"You're a big football player now, huh, Danny?" Luis said, lifting the glass to his mouth.

"Not exactly," Danny answered, fidgeting with the beer glass, not feeling like drinking.

"You're on the team, aren't you?"

"No, not—"

"This guy, Frank, said he'd see you at football practice tomorrow, didn't he?"

"Yeah, but—"

"Then that means you're on the team, otherwise he wouldn't ask

you to do nothing like that, right?"

"He didn't mean to say *practice*. It's really just tryouts. I'm just—"

"Jesus, what gives with everybody around here, anyway? Don't anybody ever say what they mean?"

"You keep twisting everything, Luis. I'm trying to explain—"

"Look, you on the team or not?"

"No."

"Then why're you going to practice tomorrow?"

Danny fought to control his temper. It was obvious to him now what Luis was up to. Sure. Luis was trying to needle him into starting something. Maybe so's he'd have a chance to use that knife of his. He glanced at his watch and saw that it was six-thirty and all at once he felt like getting up and just running out of there. But that'd make Luis angry, and he sure as hell would be coming back again sometime. He had to keep trying, trying to wangle his way out of this without getting Luis angry.

"Just tryouts tomorrow," Danny said tautly, patiently. "Just tryouts."

"Oh," Luis said, raising his brows and feigning that he'd finally understood what Danny was talking about. "But you'll make the team, all right, won't you, Danny? A big, husky guy like you?"

"Maybe."

"Sure," Luis said, lighting a cigarette and tossing the package on the table. "Sure, you will. You're tough, Danny, boy. You're real—"

"Knock it off, will you? I know why you're here!" Danny wished he hadn't put it quite that way, angrily, blunt, seeing the cold look that came into Luis' eyes. He felt he shouldn't have said that at all and he stared down at his hands and said quickly, "Look, Luis, what I mean — those guys — Pete Valles and the others—I—I couldn't help it. The cops had me, and I—"

"The cops had me, too."

"I know, but you've been in before, Luis, and this was my first time. I was scared. Scared as all hell. They had me there for six hours, questioning me, giving me the silent treatment, then questioning me again—I—"

"So?"

"So they kept threatening me, and telling me they were going to put me away, and, Jesus, I didn't have anything to do with it. You know that, Luis. You know I didn't have anything to do with it."

"Yeah. I heard you chickened out and took off like a little birdie."

"Jesus, when I saw what they were doing to that poor old guy, beating him up like that for a couple of lousy bucks—"

"You took off. You chickened out."

"I was scared, I told you. I didn't want to get mixed up in anything like that."

"Why'd you go right to the cops."

"I didn't, Luis, honest. They picked me up."

"And you sang."

Danny fell silent, and he began to feel sweat seep from his pores. He fumbled with his hands, and then suddenly finding himself very thirsty he swallowed some beer.

"You sang your head off didn't you, Danny?"

He didn't answer. He stared at Luis and thought about that night the cops were questioning him and how scared he was, scared because he knew no matter which way he turned he was in big trouble. If he sang about the others, the cops would let him go, but he'd known damn well that wouldn't have been the end of it. Not by a long shot. The gang'd have a score to settle, and sooner or later they'd get around to settling it. He remembered how helpless he felt, like the whole world was going to cave in on him, that no matter what he did he couldn't be right. But then he'd thought about the old man and the brutal beating the others were giving him when he'd run away. He'd known then that he didn't want any part of it. He'd realized, too, that he didn't want any part of the gang, either. That night when the cops took him home, he'd seen something strange happen to his folks. They hadn't said much, but the next day they'd made their decision to move away, and he'd understood. He'd understood and he was grateful.

"You pulled a sweet disappearing act after you sang, too, didn't you, Danny?"

He clenched his fists and sat up straight in the booth. "We were getting ready to move. I had to help with the packing."

"For two weeks?"

"That's right. For two weeks."

Luis grinned and chain-lit a cigarette, and then looked at him slyly. "I suppose your living out in the country and all, you want out now, huh, Danny?"

"I *am* out."

Luis blew a stream of smoke across the table. "Sure, Danny. Sure."

Danny eyed him suspiciously. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means sure, Danny boy. You want out, you're out."

"You didn't come all the way out here just to tell me that."

"Jesus, Danny, what do you think this is, Russia? A guy does what he wants. I'm head man until Pete gets back and I say, you want out—okay."

"That's a crock, Luis, and you know it. You're sore at me. You want to settle the score, don't you?"

"Me? Score?" Luis' face was a mask of incredulity. "Man, I swear I don't know what's got into you."

Danny glanced at his watch again, and he figured if he was going to make a break, he'd better get it over with. If Luis had come for more than just talk, it would force him to show his hand. He picked up his books and slid out of the booth.

"I got to be leaving."

"Me, too," Luis said, getting to his feet and following Danny to the door.

They went outside and Luis smiled and said, "Walk me back to the car, huh, Danny?"

"I go the other way."

"Okay. Then I'll walk you."

Danny clenched his teeth and began walking, warily. It was dark now and he walked close to the store fronts, staying in the light, his muscles tense, his nerves edgy, watching Luis out of the corner of his eye and wondering when Luis was going to make his move.

"How come you're so quiet all of a sudden, Danny? You ain't worried or anything, are you?"

He didn't answer, just kept walking and watching Luis.

"You gas me, Danny. Man, you really gas me. Like I said, this ain't Russia, you know. A guy does—"

It was a quick move, a calculated move. Luis sprang at Danny, shoving him off balance into the narrow alley between the stores. But Danny'd seen it coming and ran deeper into the alley until he slammed into some garbage pails. As he whirled around, he heard the click and saw the flash of the blade. He reached behind him for a lid from one of the garbage pails, holding it like a shield as Luis circled him, feinting jabs with the knife.

"You wanted out, Danny boy," Luis said softly. "Now I'm going to cut you out, but good."

Danny held the cover before him, turning and keeping his eyes glued to the blade. He wanted to get that knife away from Luis, so he swallowed against his fear as he dropped the cover, exposing himself.

Luis lunged at the opening and Danny sidestepped, whipping his books around and slamming them down hard against Luis' arm. That knocked the knife out of Luis' hand and Danny caught him with a left flush on the face that sent him reeling back. Danny dropped his books as he dove for the knife, grabbed it, and then he spun around suddenly with the knife gripped in his fist, the point of its blade forward, as he heard Luis curse and come charging at him.

He tried to pull himself out of the way, but Luis was already up against him, and then he heard the gasp come from Luis' throat and he felt the sticky warmth that ran over his fist and began trickling down his wrist. Danny let go of the knife handle and took a couple of quick steps back. He stared as he saw Luis sink slowly, become an unmoving lump at his feet. He stared like that for a long moment, feeling helpless, and confused, like that night at the police station when he didn't know which way to turn. He felt exhausted and bewildered.

He wondered if he really ever would be "out," as he walked slowly, mechanically, to the end of the alley to call the cops.

Rumble

BY EDWARD L. PERRY

*The disgrace had to be wiped out.
In blood if necessary. After all,
a Raven deb had been insulted!*



THE REST of the gang is already there when Satch and me comes down the steps. Our clubroom is in a basement. It's been a dull day, but right off I know things are going to start picking up. Patdo is mad as hell. He meets us at the foot of the steps.

"What's wrong with you, punk?" he wants to know. "When I call A Council of War, I don't want no slackers."

"Well, we're here ain't we?" Satch says off-handedly. That Satch is a cool stud. He ain't big, but he don't scare easily. Satch ain't too bright.

The whole gang is there. Duke, Hammerhead, Tony, the works. Even Madge and a couple of her Debs. Everybody is alike. Black leather jackets and T-shirts, blue-jeans tucked into motorcycle boots. The uniform of the Ravens.

I can see it's going to be a real cool evening. Somebody passes a bottle of cheap wine. We all drink. Even the Debs. I feel better. I relax. I look at Madge and start having thoughts.

She's a spitfire with black-eyes, black hair. A real cute skirt. Only it's hands off. She's Patdo's girl and leader of the Debutantes—our auxiliary.

The Debs are our skirts. We dance together, and they hang around our club. They don't mess with a stud unless he's a Raven. The rest of the punks lay off. Madge is mad. So is Patdo. I know something is up. Patdo holds his hand up for silence. We cut the lip and pay attention. Patdo is leader of the Ravens. He clears his throat and looks around.

"We're going to have a rumble," he says. There is quiet in the basement. "It's them lousy Seminoles. They insulted one of the Debs. We're disgraced. Nobody—*nobody*, in the Ravens has ever been disgraced before, and no Raven ever will. You get what I mean?" He looks around. We nod. We understand. One of our girls has been insulted. That means the Ravens have been insulted. You don't get away with that. The Ravens are hard—real hard.

"When's it going to be?" Satch speaks up.

"Now—tonight," Patdo says. "Tonight we're going to give it to them. We meet back here at eight

sharp. Don't forget to bring your artillery, and you punks who have rods, drive 'em." The meeting is over. I stop Duke on the way out.

"Who got insulted?" I ask. He says it was Madge. Yeah, it's going to be a real cool evening.

Satch and me walk around the block to the pool room. He's rolled a drunk the night before, and has a dollar in change. We play a few games of pool, and buy a pack of Camels. Then we order a round of beer. It's still early. Satch is all keyed up about the rumble, so he ain't interested in a show. Another beer finishes his money. We're broke.

"What's to a walk out to the city dump?" Satch says. "I want to get me a piece of pipe. It makes a good clobber."

We walk out to the dump. I like Satch. He's as good as gold.

We meet back at the clubroom on the dot. The place is teeming. Some of the Debs are there, but they stay put. We ain't pairing off tonight. We got work to do. Patdo gives us a quick run-down. Usually when there's to be a rumble, the commander-in-chief of the two gangs meet to decide where it will be held. Sometimes it's in the park. Sometimes at the city dump. Only tonight it's going to be different. We're going to drive right down to 4th Street and teach them bastards a lesson.

Our spies have cased their meeting place. It's a basement like ours,

and there's going to be a dance going on when we get there. We laughed. They wouldn't be expecting us.

We move out of the clubroom and load into our rods. Me and Satch pile into Duke's rod with several others. One of the gang has a bottle of peach brandy, and we take turns pulling at it. Duke turns the car radio on full blast and it's really cool. We snap our fingers to a rock and roll and start feeling real good. Satch keeps slapping the palm of his hand with the piece of lead pipe he's carrying. He's spoiling for a fight. So is the rest of us. We are all armed to the teeth. I have a switchblade and a pair of knuckles made out of a length of chain. Duke has a .22 target pistol. We're loaded for bear.

We drive through the main drag of town at a cool eighty, and take the curves on two wheels. We're like a convoy going through town. There must have been eight or nine rods headed for 4th Street.

We ain't long getting there. There is a lamp-post right in front of the Seminole's club, and we spot several of them lounging out front under it. They're smoking and passing a bottle. They spot us and try to make a break for it. We don't wait for the rods to come to a complete stop before we start piling out. We're on 'em like a pack of tomcats.

I rap the chain around my fist as I pick out one who is trying to

get back in the clubroom. He don't make it. I grab him by the shoulder, spin him around, and belt him right in the kisser. He screams as the chain rips out flesh and teeth. He falls down the stairs. What was once a mouth is now a bloody hole. I really laugh.

The Seminoles try to get up the stairs. We're waiting for them. They drop back, and we crowd into their clubroom. There are skirts there. They start screaming. A record player is putting out with some song in the corner, but it's drowned out by curses and the sound of flesh beating flesh. The Seminoles are really cooking.

A big fat slop starts rumpusing with me. I give him a crack on the cheek, and the chain cuts out a hunk of flesh. But fat boy don't go down. He lands a punch that almost knocks my head off. I hit the floor on all fours. I start to get up, but this Seminole skirt comes out of no-place and kicks me in the guts. I double up in pain. I try to straighten, and this time I almost get her foot rammed down my throat. I get mad. I don't usually hit skirts see, but I'm real mad. I jump up and belt her one. She moans and hits the floor. She's bleeding like a stuck pig.

Fat boy moves in. He's got murder in his eyes. I duck a blow and belt him one high on the forehead. He staggers, but that's all. I'm scared. Fat boy is tough. Real tough. I throw the chain away and

go for my switchblade. Fat boy hits me again, and I can almost hear the bones in my nose break. I'm bleeding like hell. It hurts. He's on me. I've got to use it.

"Oh, my God!" Fat boy squalls, reaching with his two hands at the blubber hanging over his belt. I'm scared, but make myself laugh. I tell myself I gave him some of his own medicine. But now I wish I'd stuck to using that chain or shouted for us to get out of there sooner.

The place is in an uproar, but I can hear them. Police sirens away off, but coming close. It don't take no brains to figure what's happened. Somebody's called the cops.

Fat boy is on the floor. We head for the steps. Then I see Satch.

He's down on his knees in a corner. Some bastard got *him* with a knife. I watch for a second, fascinated, a cold chill in me. Then Satch falls forward on his face, and

I know he's done for it. Just like I know about Fat boy. I get out on the street and pile into the nearest rod. The sirens are screaming their heads off. We get out of there in a hurry.

Back at our club we break up to make our alibis. The cops are sure to ask questions. I don't feel good. Even a pretty Deb don't help. She keeps asking about the fight. I want to forget. I've stopped bleeding, but my nose ain't never going to look the same. I keep thinking about Satch. I'm going to miss him. He sure went down in a blaze of glory. The gang is pretty beaten up, but it will be a long time before anybody disgraces a Raven again.

Madge and Patdo walk by. I stop her. I want to know how she was insulted. She makes a face like she's still mad.

"One of them Seminole bastards winked at me," she says.



Ladder Larceny

In Boston, while firemen were battling a \$40,000 blaze in the Stage Bar Night Club, an unidentified thief stole one of their largest ladder trucks. The truck was abandoned by the thief a short time later after it crashed against a fence at the Boston Common. Firemen explained that it would have been impossible for the truck to turn the corner where the accident occurred without a tiller man to steer the truck's rear end.



Stay Dead, Julia!

BY
PETER J. GEORGAS

I stabbed her nine times. Naturally, I thought I was rid of her.

THERE'S A GREAT deal of blood. He kept staring at it and Julia's body and saying that to himself. I never expected her to bleed like this. A butcher, that's what I am. A butcher.

Well, what did you expect from nine stabbings? he asked himself.

I went out of my head. I couldn't help it. The first one slid in so easily, I just went out of my head and hit her again and again . . .

He picked up the knife that lay at her side. The knife once used as a kitchen implement; and now, in his hand, dripping wet and glistening. A murder weapon.

Don't make excuses. I know you hated her, but after all wasn't this slightly overdone?

Can't you understand? I just went out of my head.

But look at the mess you made, he answered himself.

Messes can be cleaned up. She was a mess. I cleaned her up and now I have another mess. You can't win. Silly isn't it?

Nobody's laughing.

No, of course not. This is really tragic. He shook the knife and some of the blood flung to the floor.

I suppose I should wash it and put it away.

Oh, yes. Let's be methodical. First you were sloppy and now you're clean and neat.

Oh shut up. He washed the knife carefully and put it in the drawer. There, he said. That's done.

He bent over Julia's body and almost touched her with his hand. He thought better of it and stopped.

This is really funny. Now you're afraid to touch her.

He fumed slightly. With his foot, he eased the inert frame until it settled on its back and the heavy breasts beneath the print housecoat spread themselves flatter and the arms slipped to the sides. There was a gash in her throat and a few on her breasts and stomach. She was covered with blood.

I wish now I hadn't got so carried away, he said. I feel cold all over.

How about a shot of bourbon?
An excellent idea.

He poured himself a stiff one from a bottle in the pantry. He shuddered after he drank.

Feel better?

A little.

I suggest you finish this grisly job before you drink too much, though.

It isn't grisly.

Oh come now.

He set the glass down hard. Why don't you leave then if this is grisly?

I'm an accessory after the fact so I better stay. Anyhow, I may have some suggestions as to the disposition of this mountain of flesh.

You didn't like Julia either.

No more than you.

No man had a worse Nemesis.

Take hold of yourself. Self-pity at this stage is suicide.

You're right. He sat down on a kitchen chair.

That's it. Relax. The worst is over. She's dead and now all you have to do is get rid of Julia's body.

I thought I was rid of her when I killed her.

He laughed. Julia is evidently playing hard to get rid of.

He looked down at the flaccid face, like so much unrestricted dough. To think I once kissed that ugly mass. I held her to me. I feel like vomiting.

Get hold of yourself. You can't crack up now.

I know, I know.

Well, do it.

Yes. He sighed. He slapped his palms on his knees and stood up. What would you suggest?

Get out of here and leave her as she is.

What?

Just get out of here.

But why?

Can't you see? What you did to Julia had been building up a long time, right?

Years.

Everybody knew you hated her.

I guess so. I never tried to hide it.

The murder was premeditated then, they'll say.

I guess so.

You didn't plan her death. You got angry and went at her with the knife. For all your seeming intelligence, you sure pulled a blunder.

What are you driving at?

If you had thought of a plan instead of letting your emotions pile up so that you stabbed her nine times, your problem would have resolved itself.

Do you have to keep reminding me that I stabbed her nine times?

Will you keep your voice down?

I'm not shouting!

Yes, you are shouting.

All right so I'm shouting.

I'm trying to help you, but I don't think you realize it.

Well, then help.

For the third time, get out of here,

And leave Julia there?

I don't suggest wearing her around your neck like a muffler.

He grimaced. Don't talk like that.

Sorry.

I can't very well leave her like that.

The longer you stand here arguing the less your chances are of getting away. Since Julia's death is so obviously murder; and since you so obviously hated her, it would be simpler than adding two and two to the police.

But if I get rid of the body, I'd be in the clear. They can't convict you of murder when there isn't any body.

How do you propose of disposing of two hundred pounds of Julia? She could barely carry it around herself.

He laughed. That's very funny.

Since you acted on pure instinct, you may as well keep on that track and instinctively run.

And not dispose of Julia?

No.

You're crazy.

It was a suggestion. You don't have to follow it.

I'm not.

What did you have in mind?

Nothing definitely. But I do know I have to get rid of Julia's body.

How?

I'll think of something.

Give me an example.

He thought a little. I know, he said finally. I'll wrap her up in my old army blanket and tie weights

onto her and I'll drive down to the river and dump her in. He smiled and felt very pleased with himself.

And after that, what are you going to do?

Do? I don't know. Get some sleep. Lord knows I could use some sleep.

After you drop Julia off, will you run away?

I don't know. I haven't decided.

I think you should.

Why does my running away mean so much?

No matter what you do about Julia, the police will know it was you who murdered her.

If I run, that will prove my guilt.

They'd sweat it out of you anyway. Police have a way of getting a confession out of a person.

I'll never admit it.

You haven't a chance. Your only choice in the matter is how long you can keep away from the police.

That's ridiculous.

Oh, is it? You're a murderer and murderers get caught.

Don't talk like that, will you?

It's the truth.

Like hell it is.

As an accessory after the fact, I can't afford to get caught either.

He considered the logic of that. Yes, of course. If you think it best, then I'll leave.

Good.

But not until I get rid of Julia's body.

We'll compromise on that score. Go ahead and dispose of her.

You won't help?

In an advisory capacity only.

All right. He went to the attic and rummaged through the big cardboard box that contained his old army gear. He came back down with a blanket, and a web belt with a holster and a packet of two clips attached to it.

What's that? he asked himself.

My old forty-five. I feel better with it near me. He drew the gun from its holster, shoved in a clip and slipped it under the waistband of his trousers.

He spread the blanket over Julia's body and tucked it under her. He straddled it and heaved it over on its stomach so the blanket was now underneath. Then he overlapped the ends and straightened up.

Now to get some line from the garage.

In the garage he uncoiled about thirty feet of clothesline and cut it with the pruning shears. He looked around at the walls of the garage. What should I use for weights? he asked.

Any old piece of scrap metal lying around.

What about the tire rim?

For a starter. Remember how much you have to hold under the water. The memory almost sickened him again. She ate like a horse, he said.

And not a race horse, either.

She could have pulled a beer wagon. He laughed.

He collected the tire rim and an

old tire jack and some lengths of pipe that had been stacked against the corner for years.

He returned to the house and tied Julia up with all but ten feet of the clothesline. He dragged her to the back door and cleaned up the blood and flushed the rags down the toilet. Then he got the car from in front and backed up the drive.

Think it's dark enough now?

Yes.

Holding his breath to keep from grunting he pulled Julia into the back seat of the car. He put the weights in the trunk, then got in the driver's seat and started the motor. Oh, I forgot, he said. He got out and came back with the pruning shears. Have to cut the line with something. His mind was quite clear.

He drove slowly, cautiously down residential streets. The night was still. Once on the River road he speeded up and kept it there until he got beyond the city limits.

Any place along here ought to be all right.

Yes, it looks good.

He stopped the car and jockeyed it as close to the bank as the bushes would allow. He tugged Julia out of the back seat and onto the ground. She seemed stiffer now.

With the remaining clothesline he secured the weights to her body, cutting the line in sections to accommodate them. Finally, he was done. Julia was ready for burial.

Shall I whistle taps?

You seem awfully gay for so solemn an occasion.

I can't help myself. He bent over and rolled the package until it reached the bank. Julia hung suspended for an instant and then there was a soft splash. He felt relieved and free.

Julia is gone.

Forever.

There was a long silence.

Let's get out of here, he told himself.

In a minute. I want to enjoy this feeling a little longer.

You're a fool.

Am I?

A fool.

That's very easy for you to say, isn't it? You've always been coldly critical of me. Too much so, in fact.

Now I know you're a fool. Listen to you talk. Julia is gone and the bravado in you emerges.

I've never felt so exhilarated. He breathed deeply and exhaled vastly and the gun dug into his stomach.

Are you coming?

When I feel like it I will. Not before. He stared down at the water where Julia lay, invisible in the depths. Rest in peace, Julia, you bitch. He threw back his head and laughed.

You've gone completely out of your head. Are you coming?

Shutup.

Well?

I said shutup. Just shutup. If I want you to say something I'll tell you, so again shutup.

We'd better go.

No! I told you to shut up. Let me alone.

Can't you be sensible? Somebody will hear you.

Damn you to utter hell! he shouted. He drew the gun, pulled back the slide and released the lock; a bullet snapped into place.

Put that gun away.

No. I won't put the gun away and you won't tell me to either.

You're mad.

Mad am I? I'll show you how mad I am. He squeezed the trigger and there was a loud noise. A burning swath cut into him and he could feel liquid running free inside him. His intestines were broiling. He dropped the gun and followed it slowly on one knee. He clutched his stomach trying to dam up the churning liquid.

What happened? he asked, bewildered.

You shot me.

Shot you? His other knee moved down and he sank to his side.

Through the stomach. Hurts doesn't it?

Yes, it hurts.

I hate to say I told you so.

Please.

You wouldn't listen. You had to go wild again.

Please, he said.

Killing Julia, dumping her body and now this. A perfect cycle.

I didn't mean to.

It doesn't matter now. You won't live long. In a few moments you'll be with Julia again.

Julia? She's gone. I got rid of her. The pain oozed down his legs; they seemed to be falling asleep. No more Julia. He, too, felt sleepy.

Julia is waiting for you. You'll soon be with her.

She's gone I tell you. I'm rid of Julia. She's forever gone.

She's waiting for you.

No! She's gone.

Say hello to Julia.

His eyes weighed a ton apiece. A warmth piled up under his clutching hands and escaped between the fingers. He pulled his head nearly to his knees and cried softly. Stay away, Julia, he said, please stay away.





Office

Party

BY AUSTIN HAMEL

EVERYTHING NOW would have been the same beautiful routine if only I had quit after the first one, but no, I had helped chip in for the bottles and I guess I had to have my money's worth. The bottles were for the second floor office party. Everyone in the second and third floors of the building had a little office like mine. Most were one-man businesses. One guy read horoscopes for rich women, another

*Two's company and three's a crowd.
Especially when three is a corpse.*

ran a literary agency. I was doing free-lance publicity and doing all right—I was able to take care of Jeanne and the kids.

At the beginning of the party, everyone was a little formal and awkward in the conference room the tenants shared. The liquor included all the second-rate labels, the hors d'oeuvres were turning black at the edges. Lots of small talk at first, kind of dull.

I checked my watch and figured I'd get home early, spend the evening with the kids. But after two more drinks, the small talk became interesting; people began to relax a little. A couple of guys near the water cooler started to tell dirty jokes. I found myself joining in. I felt myself beginning to feel mellow.

Then this one guy started to look for women because there were only two of them around, the old maids we called them, and they didn't count. The guy who was looking was a salesman three doors from my coop. "Let's dig up some women," he said waving his paper cup of scotch and water.

I was going to beg off, but swallowed the rest of the bourbon in my cup and said, "Sure, let's go."

He gave me a salesman's slap on the back and we made our way out of the room to the stairway outside. "I hear there's women on the third floor," he said somberly.

"I guess we work on the wrong floor," I said climbing behind him.

I was beginning to feel light. I had had about nine, maybe more since the party began. I sort of floated down the hall after him doing things I wouldn't do when sober, like knocking on all the green doors along the way and calling at the top of my lungs, "Any dames in there?"

The other guy disappeared around a corner, knocking on doors. I wondered what the hell we would do if there *were* any dames inside, but I was having fun and laughing and feeling no pain.

I reached this one green door and knocked hard. "Any—"

She opened the door and I checked my fist short of rapping her on the nose.

The first thing I noticed was the grey hair and the young, pretty face under it. "Well, hello," I said, beginning to realize that I was pretty high, because when I'm sober and see a girl like that I clam up—speechless. "We—we're having ourselves a ball downstairs," I stammered, "and I have been appointed a committee of one to come up and bring you down . . . Well, would you like that?"

"I don't know if I can leave . . ." she said in a real sweet voice.

"Oh, I'm sure you can." I watched her eyes looking me over. They were deep eyes, and I didn't know what thought they expressed, but they were looking me over and I shifted around.

"Well . . ." she was hesitant.

"It is a holiday," I said and moved closer, touching her arm.

She smiled, a nice smile." "All right, Mr. Warren."

"You know my name." I looked at her quizzically. She shrugged, still smiling.

I felt pleased. She must have noticed me and asked the second floor receptionist. I looked her over carefully. When her hand slipped into mine it felt good. We started for the party.

It was beginning to liven up. The older guys were acting silly and the two old maids were giggling and shooting glances around, taking in everything. I spotted the salesman with a little middle-aged pixie he must have found upstairs. His face swung open when he saw my find.

She told me her name was Henny and I found out she knew how to drink. When I first saw her she was a little tense, but the liquor relaxed her quickly. We seemed to agree on everything. Some of the guys looked on mixing pleasure with envy. A few came over and made some party remark, then blew off. She stuck close to me.

The old maids watched like two hawks, figuring what a choice bit of gossip this would make the next day. But they didn't bother me, then. I never brought Jeanne to the office anyway. You know how it is when you're drinking . . . you sort of take a what-the-hell attitude. Things were going fine.

Then he came in.

I'd seen him around the corridors once in a while but never paid attention to him. I felt Henny stiffen when he entered. He looked as if he had had it. His cheeks were flushed a splotchy pink, the few traces of fuzz on his bald head were mussed up. The people who saw him come in shut up as he approached them.

"What's the matter?" he asked roughly.

Henny started downing her drink fast.

"You do not like me," the bald guy said and I noticed that he had a trace of a foreign accent—maybe French. "I am a foreigner, huh? Pah on you and you and all of you!" Seeing Henny, he spun around to us. He smiled the dirtiest, lousiest smile I ever saw in my life.

She moved a bit closer to me as he wobbled over to us. "Ah—what a delightful—dish to set before the king, you know." He was struggling for his words, trying hard to be smooth but stammering and getting hard to be smooth but stammering and getting lost. He held a bottle in one hand, one of the bottles we all paid for. "You are—charming," he said to Henny and sneered. I saw his hand working up, the hand with the bottle. He was going to pinch her cheek and it seemed as if it took him hours to get there, struggling to keep the bottle in his hand and trying to form his fingers to pinch at the

same time. Just before he touched her face, I pushed his hand down. Henny stood there like a statue. I could feel her breathing hard. He struggled to save the bottle.

"You are a moron—you—you." As he spoke he blew saliva over my face. "I am—I do not take this from your kind."

I had enough. His bloated face was beginning to get me sick, but I knew the jerk was loaded, so I tried to stay calm.

"Don't let this bum bother you, kid," I said to Henny.

His free arm touched my shoulder roughly. It got quiet in the room. I brushed the arm away a little harder than before.

"I—I interrogated for the Gestapo once," he said heavily. His face was redder and his glassy eyes looked like phlegm. "I do not take this from you or anybody." He raised the bottle meananingly, but didn't move. Just stood there swaying and glowering.

"I tell you about her—"

That was enough. I pushed him back. He staggered away, stopped, glared at me and uttered, "Moron . . . moron!" Then he let go a drunken harangue that matched anything I'd ever heard, some of it in a foreign language I couldn't figure out. I felt it coming and I knew I couldn't stop it. The drinks, as they always do, made me feel like everyone's buddy, but this guy had overstepped.

Henny's hand touched my arm

as I started for him. "Don't—" she began. "Let's go, please?"

I got away from her and grabbed his shirt front in my fist. I shook him until I thought his phlegmy eyes were going to roll out of his head. "Crawl back into your hole, worm," I said through clenched teeth. Then I shoved him loose and he bounced lightly off the wall.

Still clutching the almost full bottle, he glared at me; then he put on that dirty smile of his. There was silence in the room. They were all watching us now. He kept it up. It burned right through me like a message, but I couldn't read it. It was more than a smile, it was a story, and I shook my head, trying to get out of the whiskey daze, to read it; but he was gone, walking off, babbling quietly to himself.

Then one of the guys said, "He's got our bottle. The creep has our bottle!"

It seemed natural that I was elected to return it. I called after him, but he kept going, making his way to the little room. His door swung shut when I got there and I pushed it open. It swung back, crashing into his bookcase. Papers and notes splashed to the floor.

He watched from the desk, a stupid, startled expression on his face. The place smelled queer. "Get out," he said. Then he began laughing to himself. He sank down into his chair, looked at me, and laughed even harder, pointing a

finger at me and laughing. I grabbed for the bottle on the desk and made out with it.

When I got back I saw her standing in one of the corners making talk with one of the guys, I forgot about the bottle incident. Her hair was a little mussed and she looked just a little tipsy standing there with the drink in her hand. She looked up for me, and when she saw me, her face lit up brightly. She walked over to meet me leaving the guy standing there.

"I thought you'd never get back . . ."

I looked into her eyes. Hers shut momentarily. Then they opened wide. "What do you say we make this a private party?" she whispered.

I figured she must be wild for me.

Some of the original cast were still there when we left. A few of the guys and the old maids were still going strong—after all, what other opportunity would the old dames have to be surrounded by a bunch of men?

It was clear in the hall; no one was watching and we cut around the corner on the way to my room. We had to pass the bald guy's room and just as we thought it was all right, he popped out. He leaned against the wall, hands behind him, smiling that damned smile as we passed him. It seemed like a year until we reached the next corner, walked by four green doors

and ducked into my room. I knew no one saw us, but the back of my neck felt cold, like someone had his eyes on me from behind. Henny plopped into one of the chairs. I closed the door behind me and stared at her, forgetting all about that office party and everything that went with it.

We didn't bother to introduce ourselves any further. The alcohol knocked out any thoughts of home from my small brain. I was lost with her; the drinks made her kisses and the feel of her body seem much better than it probably was . . .

She called me "honey" and made little animal noises, her eyes looked unlike before. Now they were a little wild and intent—

The door swung open. The bald guy swayed there for a moment, then lunged for us.

I jumped up to stop him but lost my balance and fell. He hurtled past me and landed on her. Her chair went over backwards with him on top. By the time I could get to my feet he was holding her hair in one hand and hitting her with the other.

"Stop it, Alan!" I thought I heard her say. Her voice seemed icy cold but unalarmed.

I ripped him off, spun him around and shoved hard—really hard. He shot back, tripped and fell. The back of his neck connected with the edge of the metal desk. There was a dull snap. I knew he

was dead before his body settled to the awkward sitting position.

Then it was quiet, except for her breathing. She sat on the floor gulping in the air. Her eyes were wide, staring at the fresh corpse with interest rather than fear. I watched as a hand went up to her hair and put a lock back in place. I opened the door. Quiet. No one around. Sounds of the party seeping through the halls from the conference room.

I closed the door, locked it, and helped her to her feet. She sat in the chair, sober now—and so was I. When the heavy breathing stopped, she said, "You killed him."

"Yes. He's dead."

"Good."

Good? I stared at her. Her eyes went from the corpse to me and back again and I felt myself beginning to panic inside. I knew we were stuck in the room until everyone left the floor so I lit a cigarette for her, then for myself. I puffed hard, trying to straighten out in my mind the lunatic series of events.

"Do we have to stay here?"

"Yes. I want to be sure everyone leaves. It can all be worked out."

"What are you going to do?"

"When they clear I'll take him back to his office. He fell. He knocked his head against something. How should I know? Look, nobody saw us with him. Nobody saw us come in here except him."

I touched her shoulder. "Well?"

She looked up. "It's not going to work." She bit her lip.

"It'll be all right." Then I remembered the argument with him and the shoving around. They all saw it. The only way out was to put him back in his office, make it look like an accident. Go home, forget about it. Come in the next day and be surprised like everyone else. I told her that.

She sort of shuddered. Her eyes were studying me.

"What the hell did you mean when you said *good*. I don't get it."

She blew smoke. "You really want to know?"

"We've got plenty of time." I leaned against the wall. Too jumpy to sit. It took her a while to get started.

"I got to town a few months ago. Went to work upstairs. This man," she nodded toward the stiff, "he seemed so nice. I saw him almost every day around here. He was always so nice."

She paused. Her eyes met mine. She was waiting for a reaction. "So?"

"He would hold doors for me and I always saw him downstairs at the luncheonette. One day he asked me if I would like to meet some young people—he seemed concerned about my not having any friends here. He promised me they would be a nice bunch—my age, you know. He said there was this little gathering that night at his place. He helped produce for a

little theater group he said and these people were connected with it. It sounded like fun." She blinked and began to cry softly. "I said yes. I was—lonely."

"Go on."

"No one there. He told me it was too early and got me a drink . . . he had the strangest looking apartment. The phone rang. He said it was the crowd and they'd be a little late. It still seemed fine to me. Well, he got me a drink. I began to feel funny—real funny. I know he put something into the drink. In a little while I didn't know what was happening; I wasn't drunk, I sort of passed out but not really. I felt him doing things to me and I knew I was mumbling, but I couldn't talk. I thought I saw lights going on and off, on and off—that's all I remember from that night."

She had stopped crying. Her eyes narrowed a little and she looked up at me. I didn't move. Her head went down fast as if she were going to start bawling again. I rushed over and patted her shoulder.

"Take it easy, come on honey, relax. It's all going to be all right."

Her hand went up and touched mine, clamping it to her shoulder.

"The next morning I woke up on the couch. I wasn't wearing anything. I began to scream. He came in and made me stop."

She turned away from me. "I didn't see him for a week after that. Then he came into my office when I was alone. I tried to make him

go, but he wouldn't. He just—smiled and showed me those pictures. They were horrible. He said I had to show up at his place that night or he'd show them to my boss, to everyone."

"You went."

"Yes, I went. . . ."

"And he made love to you from then on."

"Yes." Her tongue ran over her lips. "Want to see what he did to me? Here, I'll show you." She stood up and unbuttoning her blouse, pulled it down over her skirt with trembling fingers. She turned her back to me.

I stared at the long, thin, red welts running across her back in horizontal lines. She stood like that, then put her blouse on. Facing me, she studied my face intently. I looked down at him. I had killed him too easily, I thought.

"I'm sorry, kid."

A shadow of a smile seemed to cross her face. "I'm glad he's dead." She bit her lip and looked at me.

An hour later it was completely silent in the hall. It was then or never.

She had sat there, calm now, watching me. "I'm taking him back. Get yourself ready." I picked him up by his armpits and half dragging, half carrying, made my way to his office. I tried to make it look as much like an accident as possible. I even went back to the conference room, found that bottle, and broke it over his desk. "He

finally got his bottle," I said glumly.

We hit the street unnoticed.

"I think we're all right now. May I take you home?"

She paused. "It's not all right. I think we ought to tell what we did. We're in trouble, we have to. If I told about him—"

I thought fast. "Look, let's go into a bar. We must have a drink. I mean it—we need one. Please."

She walked with me. "All right." "Good."

"I'm sorry," she said, "really sorry."

I ordered them straight. We downed them and I felt a little better. We whispered about what had happened, going over everything. "It's funny," I said, "I sort of felt that he was trying to tell me something . . ."

"He was drunk," she said.

Then I worked her over. I talked, talked to save my life. I brought in the wife, the kids, even the dog. I admitted that I had been a fool, how I deserved the worst for what I had done. I really meant every word.

She listened, not giving me a clue. I repeated the whole bit again, and I swear, there were tears in my eyes.

"You're in love with your wife—really in love?" she asked.

I looked up surprised. "Yes, I am."

She smiled. "That's good. That's very good." She looked down at the picture of the kids I had shown

her. I was playing it all the way. She turned the picture over several times, then she looked up and smiled at me. "All right," she said. "We do it your way." I felt re-born.

I put her in a cab. It took off and I watched, feeling my eyes burning when I thought of what the poor kid had gone through with that guy. I almost felt proud too, because I had handled the situation well. I realized, now that I was sober, that she really wasn't so hot after all—on looks. My wife made her look silly; but leave it to a few drinks to uncork a guy. The funny part is, I didn't feel so bad about killing the guy. It was as if I had exterminated a vicious germ.

The night was torture, though. I relived everything. The next morning I almost got killed driving to the train. My mind was a jumble of fear and panic.

The trip downtown seemed an eternity.

I walked through the building entrance, the same old entrance, only this time each step I took seemed final. I thought I'd never make it upstairs. Before the elevator door opened I had visions of cops all over the place, waiting for me, asking about the fight I had with him.

The door slid open. I stepped out. It was quiet.

The two old maids hovered over the receptionist's desk, talking. The clock read nine-thirty—it was late.

Berte, the receptionist winked at

me. "No mail, Mr. Warren."

I tried to force a smile. The old maids talked.

"They took him away at ninety-three. All wrapped up."

"He just wasn't a *nice* man."

"It was exciting, though."

They stopped and both looked at me sternly. Then they took off. About ten feet from me they began jabbering again. "He drank too much," one said.

"They say he fell, slipped on the wet floor. It was whisky on the floor, you know." As they vanished around the corner, their voices trailed off.

I looked at the receptionist. "Excitement this morning?"

"I'll say. They found Budres dead. Liquor all over. Fell. Hit his head on the desk."

I cleared my throat—it was beginning to choke up. "Police here, huh?"

She smiled. "Oh, yes. But they were fast. They spoke to everyone who was at the party."

I forced it out. "What about—that argument I had with him?"

"What argument?"

"Ah—I—" I couldn't say another thing, just looked at her stupidly.

"No one at the party saw anything." She winked.

"Oh." My heart seemed to beat better. "What about me? Any questions for me?"

"No, I don't think so. You were just there at the beginning. You know the two old maids—talk, talk,

talk. If they can't gossip they can't live."

"What did they say?"

"They're convinced you left the building with the girl from the third floor. Before the party got hot."

"They—they saw me go?"

"You know them. They're convinced. They think it's just awful. A married man like you. But I promise not to tell your wife on the phone. Nutty old ladies, huh?" She laughed.

"Yeah, real nutty. Thanks, thanks a lot." I walked on toward the office. Berte called. "I have a message from that girl for you."

I turned back. "Yes?"

She called, said to tell you she quit her job and went home.

"Oh, that's fine. Thanks." I wanted to jump up and click my heels. I passed the open green doors on the way back to my little office and saw them all back at their desks, talking into phones, writing on paper. They waved and nodded at me. I wanted to run in and hug them all, especially the crazy old maids. When I reached my door, I really felt human again.

I opened the door.

It felt like a punch in the nose. The blood seemed to flow from my head and I had to hold on to something.

"I—I thought you went home. They told me—"

She sat at my desk wearing a tight dress, her legs crossed, smoke

flowing from a half-smoked cigarette. "I came in the back way," she said, smiling. "No one saw me. Relax, Mr. Warren."

I stepped in, tried to pull myself together. "I—I don't get it, Henny."

"You will, in time. I'm taking an apartment in midtown. Incidentally, you'd better get to work earlier in the future. You've got to pull in some real money now, to take care of me." She looked at me and smiled through the cigarette smoke.

It began to clear. Things had worked out perfectly for her last night.

"Then that's the deal," I said.

"That is the deal. Can you blame me," she said. "You for him."

I was hers now. One word from her . . .

She shrugged. "Not too bad, huh?"

But what had the bald guy been trying to say—and what about? Something . . .

"What about those bruises on your back?" I asked.

Her eyes narrowed. I didn't like the way she looked at me—she still wore that smile, that damned smile. Her eyes moved over me from head to foot and her tongue moistened her lips.

"Honey," she said evenly, "that's your job now . . ."



Demonstration

In Detroit, Patrolman John Pedrie stopped Buster L. Goff after he saw Goff drive his car around a corner in a reckless manner. "You've been drinking," the officer told Goff. "Move over and I'll drive you to the police station. If I let you go, you'd have an accident."

En route to the police station, with Pedrie at the wheel, the car crashed into the rear of another auto.

Mystery Motorists

Patrolman Morris Stein was called to the scene of an automobile accident in Baltimore, Md. When he arrived, he found three damaged cars, but no drivers or passengers. A quick check solved the mystery. All three cars had been stolen shortly before the accident.

Terror in the Night

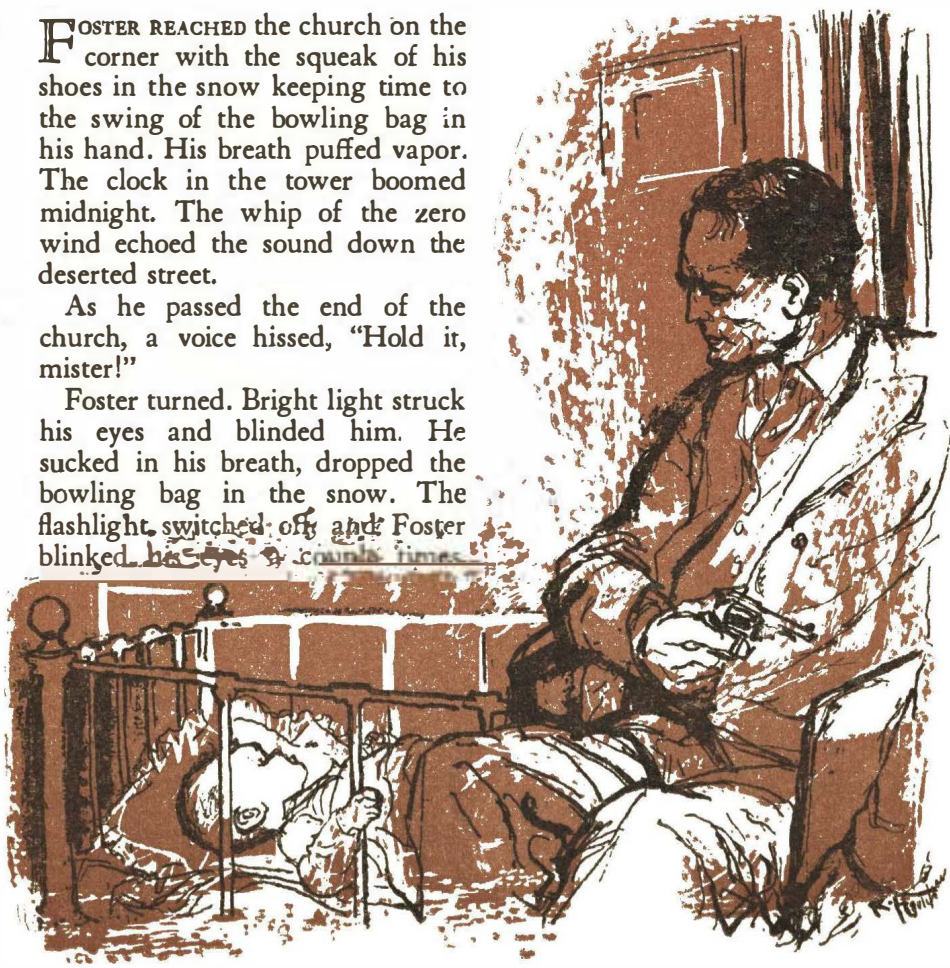
BY CARL G. HODGES

The gun jammed into Foster's guts. The voice said, "Keep your mouth shut or your wife's a widow . . ."

FOSTER REACHED the church on the corner with the squeak of his shoes in the snow keeping time to the swing of the bowling bag in his hand. His breath puffed vapor. The clock in the tower boomed midnight. The whip of the zero wind echoed the sound down the deserted street.

As he passed the end of the church, a voice hissed, "Hold it, mister!"

Foster turned. Bright light struck his eyes and blinded him. He sucked in his breath, dropped the bowling bag in the snow. The flashlight switched off and Foster blinked ~~his eyes a couple times~~.



A man in a dark topcoat stepped out of the shadows. His features were rugged. The flashlight had disappeared. Both hands were hidden in his topcoat pockets.

Foster said, "So this is what it's like."

"What's what like?"

"A holdup."

A grunt. "My name's Ryan. Lieutenant. Homicide. Who are you?"

"Rush Foster."

"Come again."

"Rush Foster."

"Not *the* Rush Foster that used to be running guard for the Bears couple years ago? Don't give me that stuff. You wouldn't hit a hundred and eighty, soaking wet. That Foster had shoulders as wide as a barn door."

Foster grinned. "Shoulder pads can fool you up in the stands. Forget the Rush. That's a family name. My friends call me Turk."

"Why?"

"Short for Turkey."

"What's that?"

"A bowling term. Three strikes in a row."

"That good?"

"Good enough."

"How good are you?"

"Carry a one-ninety-six average. Bowl anchor."

"Five men on a team. I bowl last."

"Like a clean-up hitter in baseball?"

"Something like it."

"Where do you bowl?"

"The Playdium."

"What league?"

"Commercial."

"What team?"

"Bailey Brothers. Second shift every Tuesday night."

"You work for Bailey's?"

"I do."

"What kind of work?"

"I manage the electric appliance department. Not for long. I'm going to night school. Studying to be an electronics engineer."

A gruff chuckle. "You must be a smart guy."

"On electronics, maybe."

"Where do you live?"

"This all you guys got to do? Stop taxpayers and ask silly questions?"

Ryan's jaw set. "I don't tell you about electronics or how to bowl. Don't tell me how to do my job. Now, where do you live?"

"Here." Foster moved his hand toward a modernistic little home that was separated from the wall of the church by a walk that led around to the back door and then to the alley fence. The house itself was not large, but the design was rambling and the overhanging eaves, the wrought iron railing around the stoop and the big picture window gave the impression of spaciousness.

"Nice joint you got."

"About all I own so far is the lot. Got married two years ago. Had a preemy. Special care costs dough."

"What's a preemy?"

"Premature baby. Incubators and all that. Got my head above water now. Ricky's ten months old. Getting along fine."

Ryan said, "Ever hear of a guy called Mitch Bellem?"

"Some."

"Newspapers've been full of him. Ex-con. Killed a woman in a currency exchange two days ago. Hour ago he killed an off-duty cop who spotted him in the Orpheum Theatre. Bullet in his arm. He's still in the neighborhood."

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

"Too cold for him to get far. Got no car. Got no overcoat. You got no car. No overcoat. A bowling bag would make a good gimmick to let a killer slip through a ring of cops."

"The Playdium's only two blocks away so I didn't need a car or a topcoat."

Another grunt. "The Playdium's right next to the Orpheum."

"And a bowling ball weighs sixteen pounds."

"So what?"

"Would a guy with a bullet in his arm be lugging a bowling ball around in zero weather?"

"How'd you know he got shot in the arm?"

"I didn't. Till you just told me."

He grinned. "Believe me, my name's Rush Foster, not Mitch Bellem."

"Real sharp, ain't you? Sharp enough for a driver's license?"

Foster dug it out of his billfold. Ryan looked at it under the flashlight. Gave it back. "Okay. You can go now."

"Thanks. I hope you guys find Bellem. Blast him."

"Not if we can help it. We like to take cop-killers alive."

Foster picked up his bag and moved up the walk toward the house. Ryan called softly, "Foster."

"What now?"

"Keep your doors locked. This Bellem's a vicious bastard. He's killed twice. He'll kill again. The Currency Exchange people put up five grand reward for him."

"I'll remember." Foster went around the house to the back porch. He put his bag on the step. He picked up a paper sack filled with garbage and carried it to the alley fence; leaned over and dropped it in a can.

He returned to the porch, picked up his bag and inserted his key in the kitchen door. The bag bumped against the side of a cabinet Mary used in the summer time to store garden tools. Now it contained a snow shovel and a bag of rock salt. He made a mental note to get up early in the morning and shovel the walk. Be good for his waistline.

He pushed the kitchen door open and flipped the light switch. The pleasant warm air of the gas furnace hit his face. He wondered if Mary had remembered to turn down the thermostat.

Something hard was jammed

into the middle of his back. A gravelly voice barked, "Keep your mouth shut or I'll knock your brains out!"

Foster tried to turn around. The hard object jammed again. "Want to make your wife a widow?"

His unseen captor pushed him forward into the spotless kitchen. He heard the spring lock snap shut behind them. He put his bowling bag on the floor. Stood quietly beside the chrome and yellow formica table. Looking down, he saw his captor's left hand, raw with cold, resting on top of the automatic toaster he had given Mary for Christmas the year before. He smiled at a thought. Up to his ears in debt for the house and still paying for Ricky, they had given each other gifts for the house instead of purely personal stuff. He wondered if he'd live long enough . . .

Mary's voice called from the bedroom, sleepily, "Did you take the garbage back, Rush?"

The gun prodded him. Foster smelled fetid breath over his shoulder, sucking in and out. He called, "Yes."

Mary said, "How many did you win?"

"Two."

"Wonderful. You broke the tie. You're on top all by yourself. Want some coffee?"

The gun prodded. Foster called, "I don't think so."

The man with the gun said, "Turn around."

Foster saw his visitor. He was bulky of build, unshaven and shivering. The upper left sleeve of his windbreaker was stiff with blood. The hand that held the revolver was raw with cold. The pinched nose was running and his eyes were bloodshot. But the man's jaw line was rock-firm and his bearing was one of unreasoning evil.

Foster said, "You've been shot. You need a doctor."

The bloodshot eyes glared hatred. The voice rasped. "The guy that plugged me needs an undertaker."

Foster remembered the picture from the morning's Tribune. The warning given him by Lieutenant Ryan just a few minutes earlier. "You're Mitch Bellem."

A flippant grin crossed the pinched face. "Right. Want to try for the sixty-four thousand dollar question?"

Foster weighed the possibility of diving at the man, getting control of the gun. He had thrown a million blocks on the gridirons at Fenwick and Champaign and in Wriglev Field. Violent body contact was natural to him. And Bellem looked half-frozen. He had probably been hiding on the porch for an hour or more. He'd be stiff. He was wounded, too.

Foster discarded the idea. The man was desperate and he was armed. He remembered Lieutenant Ryan's words: *He's killed twice. He'll kill again.*

"Anybody here but your wife?"

"My son. Ricky. Not a year old yet."

Bellem's gaunt and vicious features relaxed, but his eyes did not lose their fevered gleam. "Turn on all the lights and we'll take a look."

There was a whisper of footsteps across the little entrance hall and Mary was in the arched doorway. She had buttoned a blue corduroy robe around her and her feet were in fluffy mules. Her blonde hair was tousled. She was looking down tenderly at Ricky, cuddled in her arms.

Ricky, one tiny hand clutching the top button of her robe, was sleeping like a cherub.

Mary said, "Rush, he's got a tooth. A brand-new tooth." She looked up and saw the man with the gun behind Foster. Consternation flooded her face. Her lips parted.

Bellem hissed, "Hold it, lady!"

The scream died in her throat. Ricky stirred in her arms and began to whimper. Mary hushed him and stared at her husband. "Who . . . ?"

"His name's Bellem."

Her features froze. Her voice was hoarse. "Not the . . . ?"

The despair in Foster's face was her answer. She put one hand to her mouth. She hugged Ricky closer.

Bellem growled. "You know me now." He stared at Foster. "Who the hell are you? And what's your racket?"

Foster told him.

Bellem let his lips curl back over yellow teeth. "Electronics, huh? I got nothin' to be afraid of. Them super-duper blooper rays ain't gonna disintegrate nobody like Mitch Bellem." He waved the gun. "Let's take a look around the joint."

Foster walked through the rooms and turned on all the lights. Bellem watched from the entrance hall, his gun ready. "You own a gun, mister?"

Foster shook his head.

Bellem showed yellow teeth in his evil grin. "I can't take your word for that. He walked into the bedroom, searched the closet, rummaged through the dresser drawers, the night cabinet beside the bed. He picked up Mary's sewing basket from the top of the cabinet next to Ricky's crib and came out of the room with it.

He motioned with the gun. "Move the kid's crib into the living room."

"What for?"

"Move it, damn you!"

Foster rolled the crib into the corner of the living room, just beyond the chair that stood in front of the picture window. Bellem watched him from the other side of the room, standing by the little table that held the telephone and the tiny pot of African violets that was Mary's pride and joy. He jerked the cord on the lamp next to the sofa. Nothing happened. "What's the matter with the light?"

"Not connected. There's a short in the wire."

The yellow teeth were bared again. "A hell of an electronics engineer you are."

Bellem crossed the room and pulled the drapes on the picture window. He sank down in the chair. He gestured at Mary. "Put the brat in the crib."

Mary hesitated, looked at her husband. He nodded. She held Ricky close and put a kiss on his cheek and put him in the crib. She tucked him in tenderly.

Bellem frowned at her. "Now turn out all the lights and hit the hay." He put his head back and leered up at Foster. "Don't get no fancy ideas about sneaking out to get the cops. Don't get any ideas, period. First time I hear a peep out of you or you try any funny stuff, I got the answer." He held up the gun. "I smash the baby's skull!"

Foster rolled over in bed, buried his lips in Mary's hair. He felt her body tighten. "Asleep?" he whispered.

Her voice snagged in her throat. "How *could* I sleep?"

"It's two o'clock. I haven't heard a sound from him. Maybe . . ."

She twisted around. "Don't do anything, Rush! He's a maniac. He's got Ricky." He felt her body shivering in his arms. She began to sob softly. "He can't stay here forever. Maybe when we get up in the morning he'll be gone."

"Wounded like he is? To terrify somebody else? Do you think he'd leave us here to tell the cops."

"Don't do anything, Rush."

"He's been like an animal on the run. He's probably had very little sleep. Maybe I could open the window and let you out. You could get the police."

"Even if you could open the window without him hearing you, the storm windows are on. The fasteners are on the outside."

"The bathroom window doesn't have a storm window."

"No one could open it and get out without him hearing. Then Ricky . . ."

"We just can't lie here and *wait*."

"We must. Nothing must happen to Ricky."

Foster turned over, lay there for a long time, staring into the darkness. He strained his ears, trying to catch some hint of movement from the living room. All he heard was his own breathing and the pound of his heart.

Here I am, he thought, thirty-five year old, beautiful wife, wonderful kid and a good job and a house that will be mine before too long. And out of a city of four million people a killer's got to pick my place for a hide-out. Me. Never shot a gun in my life, except cap pistols on the Fourth of July when I was a kid. Don't even own a gun.

He's already killed two people. He can't pay but once for both of

them. It won't cost him a bit more if he kills us—and he won't pay at all unless he's caught. The cops out in the street asking questions. But the killer's here. In my house. What the hell can I do? Kill him with a pair of pliers? Strangle him with a coil of wire?

He finally dozed off. But his brain wouldn't let him sleep. He came wide awake again. Lay there silently, but nervous and taut, wet with his own perspiration.

Finally, he made up his mind. Slowly he moved his legs over the sides of the bed, got his feet on the floor. He raised his body carefully, inch by inch, so the bed springs would make no protest.

Mary whispered, "Don't do anything, Rush. It's too dangerous."

"I've got to do *something*."

He moved in his bare feet toward the bedroom door. He turned into the entrance hall. Familiar with every inch of it, he crossed it and gained the arched entrance to the living room. With the drapes pulled across the picture window the room was dark, but he could see the bulk of the chair in front of the window and the skeleton shape of Ricky's crib.

Suddenly the gas furnace kicked on in the basement and the minute noise made his nerves jump.

His eyes strained toward the chair, trying to pick out the shape of Bellem's body and the position of his gun. He crept forward, his body tense.

To his left something crashed to the floor and shattered.

The room lights flashed on, blinded him for an instant. Bellem was not in the chair. Mary's African violets was broken debris on the floor at his feet.

"Smart guy!"

Foster whirled toward the voice. Bellem was standing in the corner by the light switch, his face contorted with rage. "You damn Dummy? What did you think I wanted with that sewing basket? To sew a button on my pants? I stretched a thread between the chair and that damn flower pot. Nobody could get at me without knocking it off the table."

Foster said nothing, embarrassed by his own bumbling.

Bellem gestured with the gun. "Turn around."

Foster had to obey. The gun slammed down on the side of his head, just below the ear. He felt his body hit the floor, but he felt no pain. His ears recorded Mary's scream and then he blacked out.

He came awake when cold water was thrown into his face. Pain shot through his skull. He heard Mary's sobs now and he winced with pain as her hands explored his head. Ricky, in his crib, was crying to the limit of his lungs.

Foster opened his eyes. The lights blazed into them, but he held them open until the feeling of burning dizziness had passed.

Bellem was standing above him,

an empty water glass in one hand and his gun in the other. His voice was edgy. "You'll live, unless you try another fancy trick. Then I'll kill you!"

Foster scrambled to his knees and got to his feet. He'd been knocked wobbly in many a football scrimmage. This was different. There was no team mate there to make sure he had control of his faculties. There was only Mary. She helped him into the bedroom, where he collapsed on the bed.

He was asleep, or unconscious, for a long time. His tortured brain framed awful images. One involved Ricky, in the front seat of a bullet-riddled car driven by Bellem. The car careened from side to side of a narrow road above a yawning chasm. He heard the brakes squealing and the rattling sound of rocks hitting the fenders. And then the car slewed and the front end dived over the edge of the embankment.

A strangled moan came from his throat and he flung his hand out.

Mary held him tight and whispered, "Rush! Rush!"

His eyes came open and he realized where he was and his tense body relaxed from the horrors of the dream. Then his brain returned to reality. He rolled over, the bump on the back of his skull reminding him of Bellem's brutality. He explored the bump on the back of his head.

"Are you all right?"

Foster ignored the question. "That damn gun! With it, I can't take him. Without it, things would even up. I could take him." His jaw set. "I've got to figure out some way to get him to turn his back, if only for a couple seconds."

Mary said, "Maybe he'll go away."

"You can't believe that. He's hot, and he knows it. This is a perfect hide-out for him." He squirmed in the bed. "Maybe at breakfast. He'll have to eat. You can put the bread knife on the table. Maybe . . ."

"Bread comes ready-sliced, you know that."

"You on his side or mine?"

She hugged his sweating body. "I don't want you killed."

His mind was still struggling with the problem. "Maybe I can throw hot coffee in his face. If I can just get his mind off that damn gun for a few seconds, I could . . ."

"Don't do anything, Rush. You know what he said. He'll kill you."

Foster's voice was tight, edgy. "We have to do something."

Mary said, softly, "We can pray."

The alarm went off. Seven-thirty. Foster stilled it with his hand. They got out of bed, dressed, and took turns in the bathroom. When they were finished, they walked into the living room. Bellem sat in the chair, sullen, nasty. Mary headed for Ricky's crib.

Bellem waved the gun at her. "Keep out of here." He stared

malevolently at Foster. "My belly's touchin' my backbone. Fix some breakfast. Then I want to clean this damn arm. It's givin' me hell."

Mary said, "But my baby . . ."

"Shut up!"

Foster put his arm around Mary's waist. "Come on."

Bellem grunted. "I thought you'd learn your lesson." He watched them walk into the kitchen.

Within twenty minutes Mary had set the table, prepared cereal, bacon and eggs and coffee. The pleasant aroma filled the house. The frost on the lower part of the kitchen window was beginning to melt.

Foster got the bread from the metal box on the cabinet top, took it to the table, dropped two slices in the slots of the automatic toaster at the end of the table.

Mary went to the arched doorway. "Breakfast is ready."

Bellem got out of his chair and came to the doorway, his gun in his hand. Mary took the percolator off the stove and put it on a hot pad on the table.

Foster seated himself at the end of the table. Mary sat down across from him. She looked at Bellem. "We're ready to eat."

Bellem leaned against the doorway, a cynical smile corrupting his features. "Put mine on the cabinet here. Bellem always plays it safe. Uses his head. I ain't takin' no chances of having you stick me with a knife in between bites. Or

maybe throwin' hot coffee in my face."

Mary looked at her husband. He nodded. She got up and filled Bellem's plate and transferred it to the cabinet top. He watched her warily. "Now go back and sit down."

Mary went back to the table. Foster looked at her. He was dismayed at the ease with which the desperate hoodlum seemed to counter every move against him. Last night he had rigged the thread to circumvent one attempt. Now he had cunningly foreseen other possibilities and cancelled them out.

Mary said, "Darling, you're not eating your toast."

He stared at her. He played with the food on his plate. "I'm not hungry. I just don't feel like . . ." He dropped his fork, picked up his coffee cup and sipped at the steaming liquid.

Bellem wolfed his food down. He belched. He backed up into the living room. He searched for a cigarette in his dirty windbreaker, lighted it and flagrantly ground the match under foot on the carpet.

Foster rose from the table, angered by his nasty action. Mary said, softly, "Rush!"

She walked quickly to Ricky's crib, leaned over and gathered him into her arms. She kissed the chubby, warm cheeks. "Look, Rush, look at the new tooth."

Foster strode toward Bellem. Bellem said, "Very touching."

At that instant there was a sound from the kitchen. A brittle snap. Then a loud bump. Then something shattered on the floor.

Bellem whirled toward the unseen sound, dragging at the gun in his belt.

At that instant Foster sprang forward. His driving body hit the hoodlum just behind the knees. The hoodlum went down, his knees smashing into the floor. His hands struck. His gun went sliding across the entrance hall into the kitchen. He howled with the pain in his wounded arm.

Foster scrambled to his knees, straddled himself across Bellem's body from behind. He grabbed the hoodlum's hands and forced them

up between his shoulder blades. Bellem threshed violently and cursed Foster.

Suddenly Foster released his hold and smashed the edge of his right hand against the side of the hoodlum's neck. The head lolled over to one side. The hoodlum's body relaxed, straightened out, knocked cold.

Mary ran from the kitchen with the rope she used as a clothesline. Foster tied Bellem's hands together behind his back, lashed his feet together. Bellem was helpless, face down on the floor.

When the police came they were led by Lieutenant Ryan. He looked at Bellem on the floor, grinned at



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Foster. "Nice job. You'll get your name in the paper."

"Just lock him up. I'll be satisfied."

"How long's he been here?"

"Since right after I left you last night. He was waiting for me on the back porch." He related the harrowing events of the night.

"How'd you turn the tables on the louse?"

"Electronics."

"Come again."

"He wouldn't eat with us at the table. He was afraid I might stick him with a knife or throw hot coffee in his face. He ate standing up at the cabinet."

"How'd you work it, then?"

"The toaster had two slices of bread in it. I put my coffee cup on top of the toaster and pushed the plunger down when I got up from the table. I had a minute and forty-five seconds. I went into the living room and Mary and I made a to-do over Ricky. Then the toaster went off. Bellem took his eyes and his gun off me. I hit him from behind. Just like when I played for the Bears."

"Besides the five grand reward, they ought to give you a medal."

Foster laughed. "Bellem probably thinks I ought to be penalized fifteen yards for clipping."



Parking Problem

Police in Kirkwood, Mo. were surprised when three persons within ten minutes asked for traffic tickets because they had illegally parked their cars. They later learned that a scavenger hunt was on and that one of the required items was a ticket.

Impostors

Ralph Bettis complained to Gaffney, S. C., police about an unfair bandit. He said he was driving along a highway when he heard a siren and noticed a red light on a car behind him. He stopped, and the occupant of the other car robbed him of \$40.

At Kaohsung, Formosa, a 25 year old man was arrested for posing as a plainclothesman and fining cyclists on the spot for riding without lights. He had collected \$15 when police put him out of business.

Fast-Paced Fiction!

IN THIS ISSUE of MANHUNT, world's best-selling crime-suspense magazine, we bring to you one of America's best-selling authors of fast-paced crime fiction... Charles Williams. When his first story, *Hill Girl*, was published a few years back, readers and critics alike hailed Charles Williams as a "find".

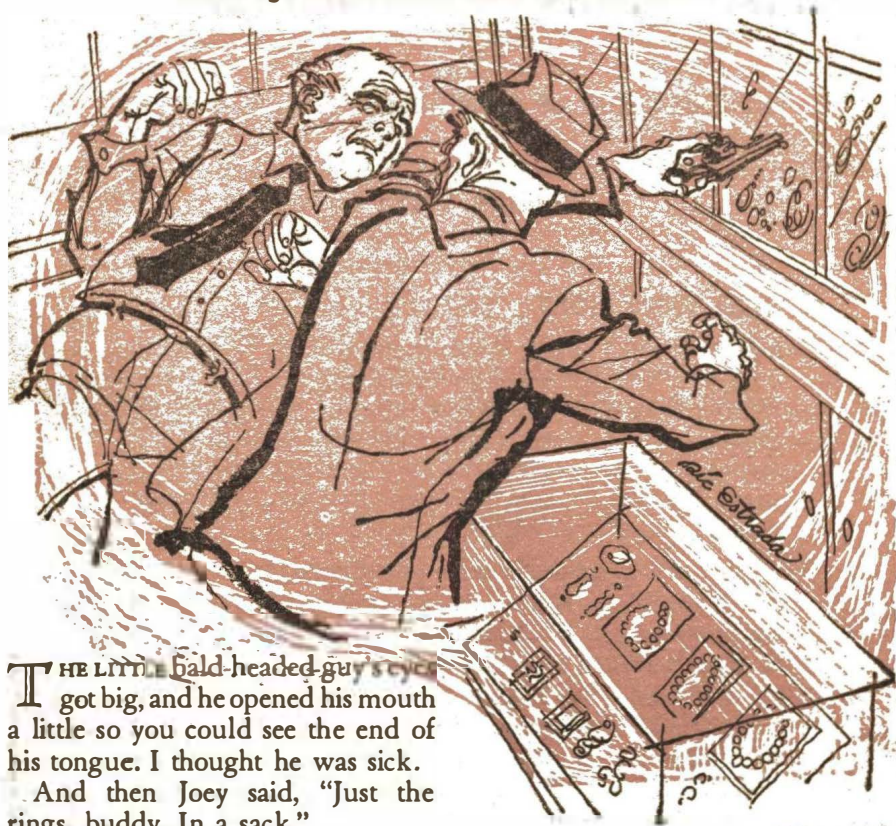
THEY WERE RIGHT... *Hill Girl* sold over a million copies in pocketbook form. It took quite some card-playing with blue chips to bring this now highly successful author's latest story to you... *The Big Bite*, on page 95 of this issue. And remember... when it becomes a hit as a book a few months from now and is made into an exciting, explosive movie... *remember* that you read it in MANHUNT first.

As we try to put this next paragraph together and select the short stories which further highlight the issue, it's tough. They're all equally good, so help us! Some are written by authors well-known to you: Norman Struber (*Pal With a Switchblade*), Joe Grenzeback (*Fall Guy*); some by writers making their first appearance in these pages: William L. Jackson (*Terminal*), Austin Hamel (*Office Party*), Carl G. Hodges (*Terror in the Night*).

Hope you enjoy this issue of MANHUNT. If you do, tell your friends!

We'd like you to keep an eye open too, for the arrival of the August MANHUNT at your newsstands. In it we promise you a literary bombshell... a full-length novel on one of today's most challenging crime themes. We doubt very much, because of its realistic impact, that any magazine in America but MANHUNT would *dare* publish this bombshell of a story. Watch for *Key Witness* by Frank Kane... in August MANHUNT.

*Dirt in my mouth and pieces of gravel, as they
drove off. The siren screamed in the street...*



THE LITTLE bald-headed guy stayed
got big, and he opened his mouth
a little so you could see the end of
his tongue. I thought he was sick.

And then Joey said, "Just the
rings, buddy. In a sack."

I looked at Joey, and I saw the
gun. He was holding it loosely, al-
most as if he didn't know it was
there. It hit me the same way it
must have hit the little guy behind
the counter. I could feel my belly
tighten.

Joey winked at me. "You better
help him, kid."

"Joey, wait a minute—!"

"Scared?" He grinned a little and
waggled the gun. "Come on, kid.
You're learning something."

Fall Guy

A Novelette

BY JOE GRENZEBACK

I went over to the display counter and looked at the diamond rings. The little guy was already clawing them out five or six at a time and dumping them into a paper sack.

Joey said, "Get with it, kid."

I tried to say, "Sure," only nothing happened. I thought about Pug Wilson sitting outside somewhere in the car. And I thought about Joey, the way it had happened. *Come on, kid, we gotta pick up some jewelry.* Like an errand. Just like the other times when I'd gone out with Pug to pick up a package or drop one off. Only this time Joey was with us. And the gun. It was like this, maybe, when Joey and Pug went out by themselves.

I could hear the traffic noise loud outside, and there were people going by on the sidewalk. I held the sack for the little guy, and the people kept going by. I could feel the sack getting wet where I was holding it.

I said, "What if somebody comes?"

"They won't."

I looked at the front door. The OPEN sign was still there, only now it was facing in. The other side would say CLOSED. "You locked it?"

"On the way in." He rubbed his paunch with his free hand, working up a chuckle. "Like I said, kid. You're learning something."

The little guy dropped the last of the rings into the sack, and you could see sweat on his bald spot.

Joey said, "What's in the box?"

It was a flat case, maybe twelve inches long. The little guy fumbled it onto the counter and opened the lid. There was a necklace inside and a big glittery pin that went with it.

"That's nice," said Joey. "Pick it up, kid."

I picked it up.

Joey looked at the little guy and grinned. "All right, buddy."

The man wet his lips. Then it was in his face again, in the eyes and the mouth, only this time it was different. Not sick, and not scared, either. Something else. I looked at Joey, and he had it too: something quick and tight, moving along the flesh of his jaw. He tipped his head to one side, and he stopped grinning.

It sounded a long way off. Then it was closer, rising and falling, making a mark in the traffic noise. The sound of it stuck in my ears.

I said, "Cops?"

The little guy started to laugh. It was a clucking noise back in his throat, soft and scared and full of phlegm. It almost choked him.

"You bastard," said Joey. He came around the counter all at once, pushing past me, filling the space with his fat body. He ran his foot along the floor close against the display case. Where he stopped, there was a tiny lump in the carpet.

Joey swore. "Direct wire," he said. "Cute."

The little guy backed away. He

banged into the wall, and the noise in his throat went up and down like the siren outside. Joey raised the gun and brought it down twice, short and quick. A flap of skin peeled away from the little guy's cheek, and a red gash showed in his bald spot. Then his hands came up, clawing for the gun. He caught Joey's hands in both of his own. His legs gave out at the knees, and he went down still hanging on.

I yelled. It felt loud, but all I heard were the shots: two of them close together.

"Let's go, kid!"

The little guy sat there with blood in his eyes and his mouth making bubbles. Joey went past me, moving fast towards the back of the shop. I swallowed hard and ran.

It seemed a long way to the alley. I came out of the building fast. My heel caught on something and I came down straight and hard, flat on my face.

"Kid!"

I lifted my head, and I could see the car a little way off. I could see Pug Wilson hanging out from the driver's seat, waving his arm. And I could see Joey. He looked at me once and yelled something at Pug. Then he climbed into the back seat and closed the door.

I tried to yell. There was dirt in my mouth and pieces of gravel, and the alley pushed hard against my chest. I lay there and watched them drive off.

Some other time it might have

been funny. I'd been running errands for six weeks—a wise-acre kid on the edge of things, playing it smart. I'd figured Joey for a fence, pushing the stuff for somebody else. You couldn't get hurt working for Joey; you didn't even know where the stuff came from.

Only now I did.

And I knew something else, too, about Joey. He was working for himself all the way. Just him. When you got right down to it, nobody else had a look-in. Especially me.

My heart boomed, and a twist of fear knotted my belly. I was the fall guy.

The siren screamed in the street, snapping the soreness out of my chest, filling my lungs. There were diamond rings scattered halfway across the alley, fanning out from the shredded remains of the paper sack. The jeweler's case was beside me. I scooped it up and ran.

At the mouth of the alley, I came hard against the corner of a building. There were people moving, jabbering, running, looking for the siren sound that was whimpering out in the cross-street. Down the block, a second siren picked up the wail, coming fast through the stalled traffic.

I tried for the news-shack. It was ten feet away, jutting into the sidewalk like a dirty green wart on the side of the building. The narrow door was half open, hanging out from the hinges. I went in

sideways, falling, and landed in a stack of magazines.

The guy inside jerked his head around—an old guy with creases in his face and a pair of dark glasses riding his nose.

"Sit still," I told him. "Look at the street."

He made a noise like a dirty word.

"Quick, damn you!"

He did what I said. I pulled my feet under me and curled down in the shadow, digging a nest in the bundles of newsprint. The siren went by.

The old man said, "What is it?"

"Shut up!"

The siren died. There were footsteps and voices and the sound of traffic starting to move again. I pushed myself up and crept backwards towards the door, keeping my eyes on the old man. Then I heard the voice—not the words, but just the sound, close by, somewhere outside.

A quick panic pushed me flat, and I saw the old man hunch forward against the counter. He said, "I'm all right. You shouldn't be running over here like that."

And then the voice again, a woman's voice, quick and uncertain: "All the sirens, I thought—What is it, anyway?"

"Nothing to do with us, honey."

"It's around the corner. . . ."

"You get back to your job," he said.

"Well, it—it could've been you. I thought—"

"It's all right, honey."

She leaned across the counter and kissed his cheek. I could see her, then, freckles on her face and dark eyes and a bundle of reddish hair topped by a little waitress cap. She was there for a second, kissing his cheek, and then she pulled back out of sight. I started to breathe again.

The old man said, "Run along, now, before you lose your job."

"Sure." Her hand reached in and touched his shoulder. "See you later."

Her footsteps moved away, and some of the tightness went out of my throat. It was quieter, now—just the traffic, fewer people. The old man didn't move.

"You did fine, Pop."

I got up slowly, crouching near the door. The jeweler's case caught on a stack of magazines, and I jerked it away—a flat case twelve inches long, a dead giveaway. It felt heavy and clumsy, and I could see the little guy in the jewelry store the way he had fumbled it open—the way he looked when Joey hit him.

The old man said, "You'll never make it, son." He said it quietly, almost to himself. It gave me the shakes.

"Shut up!" I told him. I jammed the jeweler's case under my jacket. "If anybody asks, you never saw me. Understand?"

He laughed noiselessly.

"You think I'm kidding?"

"Relax." He turned his head, and I could see reflections in the dark glasses. "I didn't see you. I'm blind."

The word rolled around in my head, and I could feel the jeweler's case crowding my ribs. I studied him. He was blind, all right.

I said, "Lucky, Pop. Lucky for both of us."

I moved carefully, watching his face. There were newspapers stacked against the wall and more bundles of magazines. I got the jeweler's case into my hand and shoved it under the bottom of the stack. The old man didn't stir.

"See you around, Pop."

I took a deep breath and slipped through the narrow doorway into the street. There were sounds in the alley, and a knot of people down at the corner peering into the cross-street. I headed the other way.

It was too quiet. The streetlights were on, and the dark was growing in the sky above the edge of buildings. People and traffic, and just a thin ripple of excitement, flowing past me towards the news-shack and the alley and the little guy in the jewelry store.

I thought about Joey and Pug and the car driving off, and I remembered the way I felt when I saw the gun—the way it went up and down with Joey's hand, and the way the little guy looked.

Sirens and cops and the sickness inside, and the sidewalk stretching away to nowhere. I didn't even know where I wanted to go.

The panic got into my legs and I started to run. It was a damn fool thing to do, and I knew it, and I kept running. There were faces and lights and the long sidewalk, and somebody yelled as I went by. Then a shadow moved out from a doorway and something solid cracked across my belly.

A big hand closed on my shoulder, and there were pinpoints of light and a fuzzy blur. It came clear, and I could see the end of the nightstick wagging slowly under my nose.

"Don't tell me," said the cop. "You was looking for a policeman."

I got sick.

The cop waited till I was through. He spat at the mess on the sidewalk and grinned. "You're running the wrong way," he said. "The excitement's down that way."

"I don't like excitement."

"I bet you don't."

He jerked my arm and we started to walk.

It was a short walk, a longer ride, and a lot of questions—a square room with a desk and a couple of chairs and a shaded lightbulb hanging from the ceiling. I was empty inside, and the fear was an ache like a bad bruise. Then I thought about Joey, and

after a while a kind of anger filled me up and I didn't ache so much. I just sat there and wished the skinny lieutenant would knock it off.

"You were running." He said it as if it was something he'd thought of himself just that minute.

I almost laughed. "What if I'd been standing still? You'd still run me in."

"Probably."

"So why shouldn't I run?"

He made a hard smile with his mouth and started in again, putting the words together in a little sing-song: "You were out for a walk. Near the mouth of the alley, you stopped to tie your shoe. Somebody knocked you down. You heard the sirens and took off."

"That's right."

"Nobody with you?"

"No."

"You didn't go into the jewelry store?"

"I told you."

"You didn't go in?"

"I was going the other way."

"Which way was that?"

"North, I guess. I was going north."

"That's away from the jewelry store?"

"It's — How the hell should I know?"

"Keep your voice down." He went over behind the desk and shuffled some papers. "Maybe you looked in the window."

"What window?"

"Maybe you looked at some watches in the window. Or some rings. You'd remember that, wouldn't you?"

"I didn't look at nothing."

"Just walked right by?"

"I told you. I didn't even see a jewelry store!"

"None at all?"

I could feel my palms getting wet, and my back was stiff. I took a breath and let it out.

The lieutenant said, "Well?"

"Ask the jeweler."

He stared at me. After a minute, he said, "We'd like to. Only he's dead."

I knew it, of course. The way the little guy looked when we ran out of the store, it almost had to be that way. Only it wasn't real, then. It wasn't real till the skinny lieutenant said it was. And then it was murder.

It was cold in the room, and the chill crept into my skin. I swallowed hard and watched the lieutenant shuffle his papers. I said, "How long you going to hold me?"

"You think we should?" The hard smile flickered at his mouth and went away. "No," he said, "I guess you don't. We'll do it your way."

"That's all?"

"For now."

"Thanks."

For nothing, I thought, *for giving me a tail*. And I wondered where it was I was supposed to

lead them—to Joey and Pug or back to the news-shack where I'd hidden the jeweler's case. It had to be one or the other, or he wouldn't be letting me go.

Well, not tonight, brother. And not tomorrow or any time after that. When they solved this one, I didn't want to be there. What I wanted was a place to lie down—a quiet place where I could try to think which way was out.

When I hit the street it was thirty, maybe eleven. The traffic had thinned, and the sidewalks were almost empty. I walked slowly, trying to spot the guy who had to be there padding along behind me with a badge in his pocket. I couldn't find him.

I turned right at the second cross-street. It was narrow and dark and nobody there. I drifted along the curb line, watching behind me for somebody to round the corner. I didn't notice the car till it pulled up beside me.

"Get in, kid."

The back door was open like a hook, close enough to touch. I couldn't see the gun, but it figured to be there in Joey's hand. I got in.

He caught my head as it came through the door and sent me sprawling. The door slammed and we started to move. The rubber floor-mat scrubbed at my face, grating the skin. Joey brought his feet down hard in the small of my back, and the shock jolted up along

my spine. I lay still. There was nothing to do.

After a while, he let me up. We were going easy, moving along past shop fronts and theatre signs, still in the business district. My face was raw, and the ache was back in my chest worse than ever.

Pug looked back over his shoulder and you could see the gaps between his teeth. The grin put extra lumps in his flat face. "Good to see you up, kid. We was worried."

Joey laughed. "We did you a favor, kid. You ought to be glad."

"Sure."

"You had a tail, you know that? Well, now you don't have him no more. Now you got us. Like old times."

"Like nothing," I said. "Like a hole in the head."

He laughed again, letting it rumble in his throat. "Don't be sore, kid. What's to be sore about? We had some bad luck."

"You should've told me."

"About what?"

"You know damn well about what. I didn't even know what was going on."

"Is that what you tell the cops?"

"I told 'em nothing."

He thought it over, squinting at me across the width of the car. "All right, kid, so now you tell me. What happened to the stuff?"

"You left it in the alley, remember? Me and it. You went off somewhere."

"Smart. Don't get smart, kid. I mean the box. The fancy necklace and the big pin."

"In the alley."

"You didn't pick it up?"

"Why should I?"

He shrugged. "It'll be in the papers, kid. You better hope they found it."

It was the way he said it, maybe, or something in his face. I could see the little guy in the jewelry store sitting there with the blood in his eyes, and all of a sudden I didn't feel so smart.

"All right," I said. "So I picked it up. It's in the news-shack at the end of the alley, under some papers."

He grinned at me. "You're yellow, kid. You got no stomach."

"Lemme out," I said.

"Out where?"

"Anywhere. Just lemme out."

"We'll see," said Joey, "after you get me the box."

"Get it yourself," I told him.

He cuffed me hard under the chin. "For talking smart," he said, "and this one's to grow on."

The edge of his hand cut low into my belly. My stomach heaved, but there was nothing to come up.

"Yellow," Joey said. "You don't even puke good."

I heard him say something to Pug, and after a minute the car stopped. Then Joey was driving and Pug was sitting beside me in the back seat. He said, "How you feeling?"

I let him guess.

"He's breaking you in," Pug said softly. "He don't mean half what he says. Only you shouldn't talk back."

"Shut up," I told him.

He looked at me blankly. Then the lumps in his face bunched together, making a scowl. "You shouldn't talk back to me, neither. I could break you in two."

We didn't talk any more. Joey slowed down, and we turned right. I could see the news-shack up ahead jutting out from the line of buildings. It was closed. Except for a truck going by, the street was empty.

"Once around the block," said Joey. "You get it before that, start walking back towards the corner. And no games, kid. It better be where you said."

He let us out near the alley, and the car moved away. Pug jerked at my arm, pulling me close to the end of the shack. There was a padlock on the door, but the hasp was old and loose, falling away from the frame. Pug got his fingers under the edge of metal and jerked it clear.

"All right, kid. Get it."

I went in low, feeling my way through the darkness. Pug stood in the doorway, blocking what little light there was from outside. I found the stack of newspapers and worked my fingers under the bottom edge of it. The jeweler's case was gone.

"Come on, kid, hurry it up!"

"In a minute," I told him.
"Gimme a match."

He fumbled a matchbook into my hand, leaning over me in the darkness. "Whassa matter?"

I didn't answer. The matchlight flickered over a pink delivery slip with the name Dougal on the *To* line. On top of that was a lead weight.

I let the match go out.

"It's under the papers," I lied.
"I can't get it out."

"F'chrissake!" He bunched down beside me, making space with his shoulder. "Outta the way, kid!"

I got the lead weight into my hand and came down hard on the back of his skull. I did it again, and he slumped forward against the stack of papers like a man gone to sleep at his prayers. I wished it was Joey.

I dropped the weight into my pocket and went outside. Across the street there was a hash-house still open, but the rest of the block was closed down—dark windows and deep, shadowed entranceways like caves in a glass mountain. I cut across to the nearest one and stepped into darkness.

The sedan came slow around the corner at the far end of the block. When it came opposite, I could see Joey bunched behind the wheel, peering off towards the news-shack. He slowed going by and stopped at the alley.

I waited.

The car door came open. Joey pried himself loose from behind the wheel and padded around the car to the sidewalk. Then he was shadow, a lumpy blob at the end of the news-shack.

I figured five seconds. The car door was open, maybe fifty feet away. The engine was running. I could make it easy.

Only I figured without the girl.

She was off to the right in front of the hash-house. First it was movement, and then the glint of light on the bundle of reddish hair, and then I saw her. She was headed out across the sidewalk, pointed at Joey and walking fast.

I moved without thinking. I caught her arm just above the elbow and turned her hard away from the curb.

"Walk," I told her. "Make a noise and I'll break your arm."

Her eyes went big, and I felt the muscle jump in her arm. She opened her mouth and closed it again, and I pushed her along towards the corner, keeping to the shadow of buildings.

"What do you want?" she said thinly. "What's that man doing in my father's shack?"

"Walk," I said.

"Who are you?"

I didn't answer. In the dark, we were just a couple walking in shadow, close together and moving slow. Out on a date, maybe. If Joey saw us, he wouldn't look

twice. With Pug on his hands, he might not even look once. And the girl was quiet, now, walking stiffly beside me.

I could hear the sound of her breathing, and she carried a girl-smell, half soap and half perfume. It smelled good.

At the corner, I looked back. The car was still at the alley, and Joey was out of sight—inside the shack, maybe, wrestling with Pug. We turned into the cross-street and I eased up on the girl's arm. She stopped suddenly and pulled away.

"Easy," I said.

"Let me go."

She looked straight at me, freckles and dark eyes. Without the waitress cap, her face was rounder and softer than I remembered. She was young, maybe nineteen. If she was scared, it didn't show.

"Let go," she repeated quietly.

"Keep moving," I told her.

"Where do you live?"

"Why?"

"I gotta see your old man."

"Why?" Her eyes flickered back towards the corner, and I knew she was thinking about Joey, what little she'd seen.

"He's in a jam," I said. "He's up to his ears."

"You?"

"Same jam."

She stopped again, thinking it over. Her eyes drilled into me, and she wet her lips with her tongue. They were nice lips.

"That's straight," I told her. "Make up your mind."

She looked at my hand on her arm. "Let go of me."

I let her go.

A half smile softened her mouth. She said, "If you hadn't done that, I would've screamed."

"Well?"

"I guess I'll take your word."

We started to walk, quicker now, the way we'd been going: two blocks, a left, then three blocks more. It was a third floor walk-up in a line of dirty brick fronts. At the top of the stairs, she said, "What's your name?"

"Tim."

"Wait here."

She was headed for a door. I stepped ahead and caught the knob. The door opened.

"Inside," I told her.

She frowned a little, shrugged, and went on into the dark apartment. I closed the door. There was no lock, but only a tiny bolt like they used on cupboard doors. I shoved it in and turned around.

"It's me, daddy."

"Who's with you?"

She turned on a lamp across the room. The old man was standing in a doorway that must have led to a bedroom. There was a kitchen off to the left. The room we were in was almost bare: a rug, a table, and three chairs, one of them soft. There was a kind of daybed with the blankets still on it.

The old man went over to the

easy chair and sat down. Without the dark glasses, his eyes were like smoke—cloudy and grey and no pupils. He said, "Who is it?"

"Tim." She made it a question.

"It's about the box," I told him. "I left a box in your shack. Remember?"

A worry line started in his forehead, and he looked straight at me. It gave me the creeps. I had to remember he was looking at sound.

"How about it?" I said. "There isn't much time. There's a guy wants that case, and he wants me. About now, he also wants somebody named Dougal."

"He knows my name?"

"It's all over the delivery slips."

The girl said, "There was a man in the shack, daddy, when I came off work." Her voice was uneasy, and I could feel her staring at me, putting the pieces together.

I said, "Figure it out, Pop. How many Dougals in the phone book?"

He scowled, cocking his head. "Maybe I turned it in," he said slowly. "Maybe the cops have it."

"Cops?" The girl went over and stared down at him. "What would you—?" She jerked her head around and looked hard at me. "Jewelry store!" She made it sound like the lobby of hell.

I tried to ignore her. "You didn't turn it in, Pop. So—"

"My God!" She grabbed his shoulder. "You brought it home? A plant? Here?"

"Why should he?" I said. "Take it easy."

"Easy!" She let go of the old man and came at me. "You know what you've done?"

"Look—"

"Shut up!" she said. "You know how he got those eyes? In a prison break! He broke it up, y'understand? He traded two good eyes for a quick parole and a chance to be decent, and now you come along!"

She made a try with her fists, hammering at my shoulders and chest girl-style. I caught her elbow and spun her away towards the daybed.

"Sit down!"

I thought she was going to cry. Instead, she started to swear—not very loud, but nice and clear. She knew a lot of words.

"That's enough, honey." Dougal waited until she stopped. He looked uncomfortable. "You see how it is," he said. "You want the case?"

"I want out," I said. "It wasn't my party."

"Then why come here?"

I had to think a minute. "It happened," I said, "that I ran into her."

"Accident?"

"Luck. Maybe bad luck. Anyway, I thought you'd like to know what you're into."

The girl came towards me, hard-faced and angry. "He's not into anything!" She looked at Dougal and said, "Where is it?"

He shook his head. "Wait, honey—"

"Tell me!"

He winced. His face went flabby, and he made a whimpering sound deep in his throat. One hand dropped into his pocket and came out full of glitter. "Please, honey . . . I—I dumped the case down a storm-drain."

"God!" For a minute, I thought she was going to slap him. Instead, she took the necklace and the big pin and brought them over to me. "Here, take it!"

I was still staring at the old man. It wasn't just the jewels, it was the way he looked crunched down in the chair. I remembered the way he'd known I was there when we first came in; the way he sat when I'd shoved the case under the papers back in the shack. He had it figured right then: an ex-con with a lap full of diamonds, an easy touch. The old bastard was worse than I was.

The girl shoved the jewelry into my jacket pocket and gave me a push towards the door. "Get out," she said. "Just get out of here!"

She was shaking all over. But it wasn't me so much, it was the old man. You could see it in her face, in the eyes. And I saw how it was, maybe, a girl like that trying to keep her old man on the straight and narrow.

I said, "Christ." There was something mushy inside, something soft and coming apart. The way I felt,

I could've been praying. I thought about Joey and how long it takes to find a phone book. "I'll wait," I told her.

"No!"

"Joey," I said. "This guy Joey. It won't matter he doesn't find me here. He gets mad, he's liable to kill somebody. He already did."

She was standing close, her face tight with the effort of holding herself together. She looked empty and scared and all alone, and I knew how it was. I'd felt that way myself a long time—only now it was her, and it made me feel funny inside. "I'm trying to help," I said.

She didn't answer. Her eyes went past me to the door. There were footsteps soft in the hallway, and somebody knocked.

"Get in the bedroom," I said.

She didn't like it, but she went. I looked at the old man, and he was sitting straight, listening. I said, "Sit tight, Pop."

The knock came louder, rattling the door. The small bolt jumped in its socket like something alive and scared. It wasn't going to keep Joey out.

I went over and opened the door.

"Surprise," said Joey.

Behind him, Pug made a noise like a puppy at mealtime. His eyes were hard bright, and you could see his teeth. He shoved forward, coming at me. "It's a party, kid. I brought you something!"

Joey lifted an arm and bounced him back against the door-jamb.

"Later," he said mildly. "You wait outside."

Pug swore.

"Outside," said Joey. "I don't want interruptions."

"Sure." Pug waggled his head and gave me another look at his teeth. "Later, kid. Like he says."

He went out into the hallway and closed the door.

"He's sore," said Joey. "I'm a little sore myself." He looked around the room and squinted at the old man. "This your friend?"

"Dougal," I said. "He runs the shack."

"I know," said Joey. He smiled a little. "This was someplace to find, kid. I didn't think you'd be here."

"Why not?"

"The way you left." He took the gun out of his pocket and frowned at it. "That was dumb, kid. It hurt my feelings."

I tried to grin. There was a dampness at the back of my neck, cold and prickly. I said, "What was I supposed to do, explain it to you? You would've laughed in my face."

"At least," said Joey. The laughter rumbled deep in his throat, but his face was hard. "You better explain it now," he said softly.

I moved away, stalling for time. Joey turned a little to watch me. "It wasn't there," I said. "I figured the old man took it."

"Did he?"

Before I could answer, Dougal

said, "That's right. I—I dumped it down a storm-drain."

"Cute," said Joey. He stepped over and slapped the old man hard with his free hand. "Tell me again."

"Wait, Joey!"

He grunted. "I'll get to you in a minute, kid!"

"No, look, I've got the stuff!"

He turned slowly. "That's better," he said gently. He came across the room, weighing the gun in the palm of his hand.

I pulled the necklace out of my pocket. There was a tightness in my chest, and my hand was shaking.

Joey grinned. "Nervous?" He dropped the necklace into his side pocket. "The pin, kid. After that, we'll see what Pug had in mind."

The gun was still in his palm, even with his waist. I knew what was coming. In a minute, I'd get the flat of the gun across my jaw.

I dug into my pocket, scratching my fingers on the angles of the pin. My hand made a fist around the lead weight I'd brought from the news-shack.

"Sure, Joey."

I pulled up on the weight, forcing the pin with my wrist. It spilled out onto the floor.

Joey's eyes flickered down—not much, but enough. I cracked the weight hard against his wrist, and the gun sailed off across the room. It stopped against Dougal's chair, and I caught a glimpse of the old man groping to find it.

I grabbed Joey's arm and tried again with the weight. My fist disappeared in his middle, and the wind whistled between his teeth. Then his arm caught my neck and pulled me in, crushing my face against his chest. His other hand came into my belly.

The pain burned in my eyes. My knees quit, and I hung limply, trying to lift the lead weight. It wouldn't lift.

Somewhere behind us, a door banged open. Joey twisted around, and I got a watery glimpse of Pug Wilson braced in the doorway. "Now," he rasped. "My turn!"

Joey swore.

I heard the gun, and the sound of it stiffened my legs. Joey let go. I pulled away gulping air, trying to clear my head.

Pug was on his hands and knees. His head went down slowly, and then his arms gave out and he splashed forward onto his face.

The fat bunched up around Joey's eyes, and his mouth went slack. He stared hard at the old man. Dougal was sitting straight, listening, and Joey's gun was in his hand. It was still pointed at the place where Pug had been.

I swung the weight as hard as I could. It caught Joey square in the face, and his nose spread wetly across his cheek. He took a step backwards, jerking his head, and the pain rattled in his throat. Then he came forward, spitting blood, reaching out with his fat hands.

I was through. The lead weight fell out of my hand, and Joey's fingers caught at my throat. I went over backwards, feeling the weight of him, trying to twist away. His fingers closed over my neck, digging into the flesh. The blackness came up, and there was a touch of cool air, as if someone had opened a window—or a door.

The room came back slowly, spinning. Joey was sprawled across me, not dead because I could hear the sobbing gush of his breathing. I pulled myself clear and sat up, and I looked at the back of his head. It was a near match for the front.

The girl was standing beyond him, tall and straight and breathing hard. The lead weight showed dull red against the thin whiteness of her hand. The thing she had done was working in her face.

I got to my feet.

"Is it over?" Dougal's voice was cracked and curious, trembling a little. He still had Joey's gun in his hand.

"It's over," I said, and the words hurt my throat. I went to him and took the gun away.

"I—I hit him?"

"You did fine." I went to the door and looked out into the hallway. There was nobody there. If someone had heard us, they were playing it quiet. I pushed Pug's legs out of the way and closed the door.

Dougal said, "It was your fault.

They—they can't touch me. It was you!" He looked scared.

"Sure."

I almost laughed. Pug shot by a blind man, and Joey beaten unconscious by a girl. Nobody'd believe the way it was. They'd want the answers from me.

I looked down at the gun in my hand, and I wondered how far I could get.

"What are you going to do?" The girl was staring at me. I saw her red hair and freckles, and her eyes, soft with beginning tears.

I tried to think.

"You could've gotten away," she said softly. "Back there on the street, even here. I—" She nibbled

her lip and glanced at the old man. "You still could."

"Sure."

We stared at each other. I could feel the softness growing inside; loneliness and hunger and the ache of all that had happened.

Very faintly, she said, "Well?"

I threw the gun onto the daybed and sat down. "You better call a cop."

She looked away. "The phone's in the bedroom, Tim. I—I already did."

It was funny the way she used my name, soft-like.

I said, "Sure. Sure. That figures."

She turned. There were tears on her face.



A Date with Harry

BY
GEORGE LANGE



You cops make me sick. All the time asking why. Why did you do it? What do you have to know *why* for? What difference does it make?

All right, I'll tell you, but you ain't gonna like it.

I'm in this saloon, see, Jerry's Bar I think is the name of it, over on Eighth Street. I'm drinking a beer, and through the window I can see this guy outside, standing on the curb and looking up and down the street, like maybe he's ex-

The rye was strong and girls sounded like fun, so he went along...

pecting somebody he don't exactly want to see. Then after a little he turns and ducks inside the door. Real quick. Once he's inside he relaxes. He stands next to the door and lets his eyes get used to the darkness inside.

He's dressed sharp and he carries a leather case, like a salesman, so he looks out of place in this crummy joint. But he walks over and greets the bartender, and the bartender says, Hi, Harry, so I figure he must have been in before.

There's nobody in the place but him and me and a middle-aged couple at a table on the other side of the room. I'm at the back end of the bar, and this guy—this Harry—he climbs up on a stool two places down from me and orders a beer. The bartender draws one and rings it up, then he goes down to the front end of the bar and leans against the empty beer cases. I notice that he's watching this Harry out of the corner of his eye.

Well, I don't think anything of that, and I'm sitting there drinking and so is Harry, kinda slow and easy like, enjoying the cold beer, with his hat pushed back a little and his salesman's case on the bar beside him. Then first thing you know he slides over on the stool right next to me. Ordinarily, when something like that happens it's either a guy trying to put the bite on me for two bits or a cigarette or something, or else it's the cops. I can tell this guy's neither one, so

I just sit there and wait him out.

Sure goes good on a hot day, he says, and drains off his glass. I say it sure does, and I drain mine. Let's have another, he says, on me. So okay. We have another, and then another, and then some more. All the time he's talking real friendly like about the weather and the ball team and one thing and another. Me, I don't say much but yes and no and how-about-that. I can't afford to go shooting off my mouth to everybody and his dog. So he talks and talks, and pretty soon the couple at the table get up and leave. Then Harry leans over and says, I got enough of this hogwash. Let's have something that's got a little charge in it. So he orders rye for the both of us, and as long as he's paying why should I care?

I don't know how many of those we have, but I'm beginning to feel it. Harry, though, is tossing 'em off like water and coming back for more. Finally he leans over toward me, and he puts his hand on my leg and he says, How'd you like to have a little fun?

Well, I says, that depends on what you call fun.

He squeezes my leg a little and says, Up in a hotel room. You know.

I shoulda tumbled to the caper then and there, but, well, I'd had quite a lot of the rotgut and I guess I'm not very bright anyway, so I ask, What's the pitch?

He looks at me kinda funny for

a minute, then he says again, You know. Up in the hotel room.

Dames? I says.

Yeah, sure, he says.

I ain't got that kinda bucks, and I tell him so, and he says, Forget it. It'll be on me.

You'll take care of everything? I says, and he nods his head.

Well, I figure he's made his load, only it don't show much on the outside, and maybe he's one of these jokers needs somebody along with him to kinda push him over the edge. I'm quite a bit bigger than he is, and I know if there's any trouble I can take him, even half shot as I am.

He sits there staring at me, waiting for me to make up my mind. What the hell, I've got nothing to lose, and besides it's been a while since I've had a girl.

Let's go, I says, and I climb down off the stool. I'm a little shaky with the liquor and I grab the edge of the bar to steady myself, and Harry says, By the way, what's your name?

Call me Jack, I says, that's close enough.

Okay, Jack, he says, let's have one more for the road.

So we do, and then he buys a pint and drops it in his case.

That'll come in handy afterwards, he says.

He takes me by the arm and we go out and down the street somewhere. It's all a little foggy in my mind. I'm really feeling the

rye, and I guess I stumble once in a while because I can remember him grabbing me. Finally we barge into this place—I can see it's a cheap hotel—and Harry leans me against the counter and signs the register.

Then he leads me up a flight of stairs and into a room. I flop down in a chair and I notice he locks the door, but I'm too drunk, I guess, to pay much attention, or to wonder why. He takes off his hat and puts it on the dresser, then his coat, and he hangs that on the chair. Then he gets out the bottle and twists off the cap. He hands it to me.

Drink up he says.

I take the bottle, but I don't drink. I look around the room. There's only a single bed. No women.

Wait a minute, I says. It's gonna be pretty crowded in that bed with four of us. And that reminds me, I says, where's the dames?

Don't worry about it, Jack, he says. Drink up.

He goes in the bathroom and shuts the door. I sit there trying to get the picture. The way it stands, I don't like it. And that's bad. Because I'm a guy will go along with any gag as long as I'm not the patsy. But I'm also a guy will get plenty rough when I'm handed the short end of the stick. In fact, that's where all my past trouble with the cops comes in. Assault and battery. Assault with a deadly weapon. As-

sault with intent to kill. These are the raps they made stick. That ain't saying anything about the times I beat the rap, and the times I wasn't even picked up. I've never been able to do anything about it, though. A guy gets me mad and I get crazy-mad, especially when I'm drunk. I waded in and keep on coming until the other guy runs or somebody—usually the cops—interferes, or I get the hell beat outa me. Or until the other guy lays there and don't get up no more.

Naturally, Harry don't know this, and I'm hoping he don't have to find out. But I'm sitting there, and I can feel the liquor boiling in my guts, and I begin to get the notion that there ain't gonna be no dames.

I take a big slug outa the bottle, then I call to Harry: What are you doin', Buster? When are the girls coming? Just to see what he'll say, you know.

Well, with that Harry comes out of the bathroom. You shoulda seen him. It was enough to turn your stomach. His eyes are popping out so you could knock 'em off with a stick, and his mouth was open in a slobbery grin, and I'm a sonofabitch, he didn't have any pants on. He says, real soft-like, We don't need any girls, Jack. Just you and me. We'll have fun all by ourselves.

I jumped out of the chair, and the whiskey bottle fell down and slopped all over the place. I'm fighting it now, fighting the mad

that's beginning to pound in my brain.

Look, mister, I says, if you know what's good for you, get the key and open that door and let me the hell outa here. Fast.

He runs over and flattens himself against the door. His eyes are almost wild now. If I wasn't so burned up I'd be scared half to death.

No, no, he barks at me. You can't leave me now. I won't *let* you go.

I'm standing right in front of him. It's so sickening I can't hardly look at him.

Listen, oddball, I says, I been up three times for beating guys. I'm gonna count to three, and you better have that door open or you'll be next.

I start to count, but he kinda crouches down, with his arms spread open like a wrestler ready to put on a bear-hug, and he starts moving toward me, real slow.

You don't know how long I've waited, he says. You don't know what it's like, to be the way I am, with a good job and a place in the community—and to have to scrounge around in skid row to find the thing I really want.

He comes in fast, then, and I step back and I yell, Get outa my way!

But he keeps coming.

Then I'm swinging, and the blood is running everywhere . . . and he don't get up.

After that I don't remember nothin'. I don't know how I got out of the room or out of the hotel. I don't know how I got to that alley where you found me.

I didn't really want to kill him,

Sarge. Honest, I didn't want to kill him. I only wanted **him** to let me alone. And that's why . . .

Does it make a difference, Sarge? I counted to three. Honest to Christ, I counted.



Traffic Troubles

John T. O'Brien explained to a judge in Chicago why he stole a car when he already owned one. "I was too drunk to drive my own car," he said.

And in Gravesend, Eng., Leslie Woodward, 52, was acquitted on a reckless driving charge after police said they found 14 women riding in Woodward's car. But the judge fined Woodward for letting a dog ride on the hood of the vehicle.

On his seventh charge of driving without a license, Walter J. Chapman, of Mineola, N. Y., was sentenced to 100 days in jail. Chapman testified that he'd never been able to get enough money to afford both car and license at the same time.

Swindled Stock

Police in Hammond, Ind., abruptly ended the prosperous business of an itinerant shoe salesman who had been offering bargains from his station wagon. The salesman, Lawrence M. Hofner, 28, of Dearborn, Mich., admitted to detectives that he had acquired his stock fraudulently in 13 cities in four states.

He would enter a shoe store, explain that his wife had sprained her ankle, and ask to take out one shoe each from three or four pairs from which his wife could select a pair she liked. In another store in another city he'd repeat the story of his injured wife and walk out with the mates of the shoes he had "borrowed" earlier.

Detectives found 100 pairs of shoes in the station wagon as well as an index file with catalog numbers of shoes carried by most shoe stores in the midwest.

Change for a G-Note

BY JERRY SOHL

*Everything must come to an end—
dreams, and money, and friends.
But such a rotten end . . . ?*

HARRY JELSON's hands shook as he took out the Prince Albert can and thrust a waxy forefinger inside. During a moment of frantic probing he thought the money was gone, then his finger felt the paper and he drew out the hundred dollar bill.

He started at it with blood-flecked eyes. It was his last hundred dollar bill, the last of a number of large bills that had once filled the can and he was thinking how careful he'd have to be with it because it would have to last a long time. He didn't want to think how long.



He snapped the top of the can down, put it back empty on the dusty cabinet shelf underneath the sink where he always kept it. Then he carefully folded the bill, put it in his pocket, moved out of the room, a thin, hungry-looking man with silver beard stubble, rheumy red eyes and a consuming thirst.

A little later Jelson returned, his step lighter on the stairs. He set

the fifth he had bought on the table, went into the kitchen to wash the old cracked cup, came back and started to drink, eager at first, spilling a little, then taking it more slowly and relaxedly, feeling the tension ebbing, the warmth returning, the good feeling coming on again.

He kept on until the bottle was empty, taking the last of the liquor quickly. Then he settled back for release. He slipped into it smoothly and easily, welcoming it as a familiar thing, embracing it as a lover.

Then they were slapping him and he didn't want to leave the warm dream and he kept slipping back because the dream was where he wanted to be, but when they dumped the cold water on his head and he drew in a quick breath he knew then he wasn't going back. They weren't going to let him.

They yelled at him and hit him and he could see their shapes but he couldn't see who they were and he had a wild thought that maybe they were cops, but then he knew they weren't because cops wouldn't come in and act like this just because he was on the bottle.

"Come on, come on." He was slapped again and he could feel the sting of palm, that's how far he was from the dream, and now he could even see a little. Why were they here? Why couldn't they let him be, him and his dream? He wasn't bothering anybody. Then he had a sudden agonizing thought:

Maybe they'd come for the bottles, those lovely bottles, all of them full, row on row of them underneath the sink. But then he knew they hadn't because there weren't any bottles there any more. Not full ones. anyway. Only empties. They wouldn't want those. Maybe it was the money in the Prince Albert can! But nobody knew about that but him, so they wouldn't be after that.

They had him on his feet and were walking him around the room, massaging him and shaking him and yelling. "Come on out of it, old man!"

Jelson caught a clearer glimpse of face and muttered "Stelder" in relief because that's who it was—Stelder—and he knew Stelder wouldn't touch the bottles. No, not the bottles. They were empty. The money? No. Stelder wouldn't touch that.

"That's better, Harry," Stelder said, planting himself in front of him and Jelson could almost see him distinctly, his massive face, the cold-as-marble eyes.

Jelson became aware of others in the room, sensed they were watching him, his bobbing head finding a white-faced man in the corner, hand to his shoulder.

"All right," Stelder said. "See if he can stand up."

The arms gave way and Jelson wavered precariously and he longed more than ever for the dream and would have fallen back into it, but

he was caught and brought up again. He stood alone now, swaying on his feet, with massive effort focussing eyes to seek them out.

He knew all but one. There was Stelder, big and impassive, standing by the kitchen door; there was a girl—who was she?—sitting on one of the chairs they'd got from the kitchen; Peewee was on the bed, lighting a cigarette; and there was the wounded man. Jake Lister. He saw, too, that Jake had it bad. He could see the blood oozing through the fingers at the shoulder.

Jelson leaned against the table in the middle of the room, his breath rapid and shallow, feeling heavy in every joint, tasting his sour mouth.

"He don't look like a doctor to me," the girl said.

Stelder snorted. "He'll do. He'll have to do. Used to be quite a doc in the old days, didn't you, Harry?"

"Long ago," Jelson said feebly. "Long ago."

"Not so long," Stelder said evenly. "You can do it."

"No," Jelson protested, shaking his head and nearly losing his balance with sudden dizziness.

Stelder laughed and Peewee jerked his head up from cleaning his fingernails to squint darkly at Jelson through the thread of smoke.

"You'll do it." Stelder turned indifferently to Lister. "On your feet, Bum. And do as the doc says."

"I don't have a license," Jelson wailed.

"Don't make me laugh, Harry. You ain't had a license for years."

"I quit. I can't do it, Stell"

"You're back in business, Harry."

"No!"

"Jeez!" Lister groaned through clenched teeth. "I got to listen to all this? This shoulder's killin' me!"

"I said on your feet."

"Let's go someplace else."

"You got a place in mind, Jake?"

"I don't like this set-up."

Stelder advanced toward Lister, saying coldly, "Maybe we should have left you where you got it."

Lister's eyes mocked him. "You know damn well why you couldn't do that."

"All right, have it your way. But you better let the doc get started."

"I'm not doing it," Jelson said, trying to stand straight to let them know he was saying it with strength.

A blow on the side of the head sent him reeling to the floor. The dream was awfully close then and he almost embraced it, but the delayed pain of the fall brought him back.

"This place stinks," the girl said.

Stelder said, "Shut up, Baby."

Jelson looked at Baby now, saw she was young, blonde, a little on the buxom side and a little hard in the mouth, but otherwise nice, almost as nice as some of them he met in his dream . . .

"He'll be all right," Stelder said. "Won't you, Harry?"

They helped him to his feet, Jelson feeling his years and wondering why it had to happen and thinking that he was tired.

"Where do you want him, Harry? On the table?"

"I don't want that dirty old man workin' on me," Lister said.

"You want to die I suppose?" Stelder said. He ran a forearm along the tabletop and knocked off a saucer full of butts, the old cracked cup and the empty bottle. The sound exploded in Jelson's head and he closed his eyes with the pain of it.

"Come on, Jake," Baby said in a bored voice. "Get it over with so we can get out of here."

"What d'you need?" Stelder growled.

"I need a drink," Jelson wailed, his lower lip trembling uncontrollably. "I need one bad." He started to shake.

"Christ!" Peewee said in disgust.

"Get him a bottle," Stelder told Peewee in a moment of decision.

"You want I should go out?" Peewee said in amazement.

"There's a place on the corner," Stelder said. "Nothing's going to happen to you."

When Peewee came back Stelder let Jelson drink a little, then Stelder said, "What'll you need to fix Jake up, Harry?"

"He'll need morphine." Jelson said in an almost normal voice.

"We're fresh out, Harry," Stelder said.

"Chloroform then. Or ether."

"You got any of that?"

Jelson shook his head, eyed the bottle Stelder held. Release was in there, right in there with the brown liquid that sloshed and sparkled as Stelder said, "What the hell did you do with all your stuff, Harry?"

Jelson shrugged. "Sold it." He didn't take his eyes off the bottle.

Stelder rationed him another drink and they talked about what they'd need and Jelson, feeling better, settled for a paring knife Peewee sharpened while Baby was sent out for a little chloroform for her cat and Stelder cut up an old sponge he found in the kitchen and tore up the dirty, holey sheet off Jelson's bed. They put it all in a pan of boiling water while Jelson drank a little more to steady himself while he looked over the wound.

It brought back the old days, seeing the hole the .38 had made in the left shoulder. He figured it was lodged in the deltoid muscle and would take some digging to get out.

They brought the pan of steaming water and Jelson, after another drink, got to work. Baby let the chloroform fall drop by drop in Stelder's handkerchief that Jelson had fixed over on a tea strainer, being held now on Jake's face. Jelson forgot about the bottle for a while, thinking instead how long it had been since he'd worked like this, and he was surprised how

steady his hands were. Twenty years, wasn't it? All of that, back in the days when Stelder was a young punk and Jelson had the job of putting him and others like him back together again.

Then there were the days after that, days when books were brisk, when slots invaded the stores—even the candy stores—and then the pinballs and numbers. There wasn't much business for Jelson then and he turned to another avenue for business. And one of the girls had to die. Hemorrhage. Right on the operating table in the clinic he'd set up. A bad break and an end to his abortion racket. And the end to his license, too.

Well, he'd salvaged quite a pile, put it all there in the Prince Albert can, though there would be only the change from that last hundred dollar bill there now. Enough to buy a bottle after this was over. He'd buy a dozen bottles.

Thinking about it brought on the shakes again. Stelder had to let him take another swig. He took a long one, draining the bottle. He'd have to hurry. Get it over with. Then get some more.

It wasn't too hard to figure out why Jake had stopped one. The cops were closing them up—all of them—pinballs, slots, numbers—everything. And Stelder and his boys had to turn to something else. What had it been? Holdup? High-jacking? Robbery?

"You got to go that deep?" Stel-

der said in a strained voice.

"It went way in," Jelson said. The light wavered and he thought he was going to black out, but when he looked up he saw it was only Peewee who was swaying, staring fascinatedly at the pulsing blood, his face the color of ivory. Stelder snatched the lamp out of his hand and held it.

And then it was over and Jelson was wrapping Lister in the still-wet bandage and Stelder was saying, "You ain't lost your touch, Harry," and Jelson was thinking he'd better get some of that money out of the Prince Albert can and go buy another bottle—two bottles—a dozen bottles—or maybe Stelder would buy him one for what he'd done.

They put Lister on Jelson's bed and Jelson's mouth felt hot and dry and hungry and Baby said in shrill surprise, "Can't you wake him up? We got to get out of here! I can't take much more of this dump!"

"Easy, Baby," Stelder said quietly. "We'll have to wait till he comes to, see if he's going to be all right."

Jelson started toward the kitchen, the weariness really coming now. He'd really have a case if he didn't get out and buy something quick.

"Where do you think you're going in such a hurry, Harry?" Stelder said, moving to the doorway.

"I got to get another bottle," Jelson said.

"You mean you had a bottle in

the kitchen all that time?" Peewee snorted.

Jelson, uneasy now since they barred his way, said, "I got some change in the kitchen."

Stelder smiled thinly. "You stay in here where we can keep an eye on you, Harry. We don't want you traipsing off."

And when they didn't get out of his way, Jelson said, "I did a job for you."

"Thanks, Harry," Stelder said, grinning. "Now sit down."

Jelson stood looking in growing panic beyond them to the dark kitchen where the Prince Albert can was drawing him like a magnet. His hands were shaking, his throat was so tight he couldn't swallow, and he kept running his tongue along his lips. Jesus, were they really going to keep him from going out there?

"Sit down, Harry!" Stelder roared, his knee coming up, his hand coming down hard on the back of his head as Jelson bent over. He fell to the floor, but he didn't care about the hurt, he just knew he had to get the dough, had to get it for a bottle. He started crawling toward the kitchen, unmindful of Stelder's legs in the way.

Peewee's foot caught him behind the ear and he went down in a flashing of lights.

Jelson didn't want to leave the dream, but a finger kept prodding him in the ribs. He was in the kitchen on the floor, he saw, and

moving sideways helped get rid of the finger that prodded him.

He looked down. A paring knife was there. With trembling fingers he picked it up.

Faintly from beyond the door he heard low voices and suddenly what he had done in the other room slammed home to him. The knife. He turned it this way and that, seeing the light gleam dully on the polished blade. He had used it to dig the bullet out of Jake Lister. Then they had tried to keep him out of the kitchen.

He turned frantic eyes to the cabinet where the opened doors beneath the sink revealed only empty blackness. Then he was at the cabinet, grabbing the can and opening it. Empty! So that was it! Stelder had taken the money!

Jelson drew himself erect, the knife still in his hand, his thumb atop the blade. He walked slowly, deliberately to the door, swung it open.

Stelder rose slowly from the bed to look at him annoyed.

"The money," Jelson said thickly. "You, Stelder, you took it . . . the money." He started the long walk across the floor, the knife raised. He lunged.

Baby screamed.

Peewee's gun popped like firecrackers.

Jelson felt a giant unseen hand push him back, the bullets zipping clean through him, a gratifying indolence coming in behind them,

warming his insides like whiskey, spreading comfort throughout.

Release was near now. He could feel it. As he felt he knew by the way it was starting it would be

the best dream he'd ever have.

When they were stripping Jelson's body of anything that would identify it, they came upon the crumpled bills in a pants pocket.



Contest Winner: YOU, detective

No. 11 — THE RICH CORPSE

Evelyn Lesser Harvey

1099 David Avenue

Monterey, California

Hammond went to the window, pulled back the drapery. Rain beat against the glass. "Noisy. Two hours ago it was even worse," he said, swinging around. "No one would have heard a struggle—an ailing man surprised behind his closed door. It would be easy enough, I suppose. Was it, Grayson?"

"I-I. You're not accusing *me*?" Fred Grayson pulled himself straight, stared. "Why me? Why should I—?"

"For your brother's sweetheart. And for all the Grayson money you'd have

between you." Glancing at Freida Kopp, Hammond saw the color fade out of her face. "You introduced Miss Kopp as your fiancée, but later mentioned her almost as an afterthought. So different from the way you spoke of Alma Terry!"

"Try to prove it!" Grayson blustered. "Anyone here had as much reason to kill George as I—"

Hammond stopped him. "Look at the women's hands. Neither one could have choked your brother without breaking those long, pointed nails. Or chipping the polish, at least. Also, there's not a sharp mark on your brother's throat, not a scratch on his skin." He stepped to Grayson's side, took his arm. "You'd better come with me."

Grayson shook his head despairingly. "I'm coming," he said.



CHARLIE WAS COLD. Colder than solitary in Joliet. An icy coil of shock started to knot in his stomach. He turned up his topcoat collar and shivered.

The attendant walking ahead didn't seem to notice the chill draft of stagnant air. Whistling through his teeth, he unlocked a door. And

Charlie stepped into the concrete coldness of the morgue.

White enamel tables and white cabinets glared harshly under the torrent of light from the white ceiling.

"You wanna see the D.O.A. hemorrhage case we got today, right?"

Charlie nodded. The icy knot



"What a doll!" the morgue keeper said, pulling down the sheet. "Not a mark on her."

D.O.A.

BY JULES M. ROSENTHAL

tightened. A faint odor of refrigerated death clung to everything in the room.

The attendant walked to one of the cabinets and pulled it open. Six feet long, it slid noiselessly on roller-bearings. He turned down the sheet.

Charlie looked at the ashen face. Thelma. Like a puppet's head carved in colorless wax.

"Brought her in about ten this morning. Landlady found her when she went to change the bedding." The attendant smirked at an amusing thought. "To hear her tell it she'll have to change the whole bed now. Blood soaked clear through the mattress."

Charlie didn't hear him. He stared at the thing in the cabinet. Thelma. No, this was some horrible mistake. Thelma was in her room waiting for his call. Resting the way the doctor said she should. Thelma was home waiting for Charlie to date her and tell her what to do. Thelma would be there to kiss him and run her hand through his hair saying, "Charlie baby, let's get married soon." Just like last night.

"No relatives I understand." The attendant was still talking. "What's your interest mister?"

"Friend," Charlie heard himself answer. "I'll arrange for the funeral." He didn't recognize his own voice. The icy knot jerked tight. Another one started.

"What a doll!" The morgue

keeper said, pulling the sheet down to her waist. "Not a mark on her."

Charlie wanted to kill him, wanted to smash his lewd face against the glaring white cabinets. But he couldn't. A sickening numbness was paralyzing him. The attendant, Thelma, and the cold brilliance of the room began to spin.

"Any idea who's responsible for her winding up in the freezer?" the attendant asked, still staring at her pale breasts. "Bet she isn't a day over nineteen, right?"

Choking down his nausea, Charlie turned and ran from the room. But as he stumbled along the corridor, one thought began piercing the frigid wall of shock. "Thelma's dead—Thelma's dead. . ."

Hot coffee didn't thaw the knots of ice in Charlie's stomach. But four shots of scotch loosened them enough to start him toward the 800 block on Ogden Avenue. He drove slowly. The attendant's damning words "who's responsible" began plodding through his mind as often as "Thelma's dead."

Parking the car across from a White Tower restaurant, he opened the glove compartment and checked his .45. There was a full clip. He hadn't used it on the gas station job two nights ago. Walking to the middle of the block, he crossed the street and stood in front of a Hospital Supplies store window.

The reflection was of an old man. Charlie was startled. He looked double his thirty-one years.

Hunched shoulders, thin shadowed cheeks, and dull hopeless eyes stared back from the glass. Charlie mouthed the words, "who's responsible."

The knots began to come apart as he gripped the .45 and walked quickly to a nearby door.

Through the dirty pane he could see a woman sitting on the stairs, gagging and sobbing hysterically. Charlie brushed past her taking the steps two at a time.

At the head of the stairs he turned left and faced an open apartment. A woman stood in the doorway talking to someone inside. She heard him and swiveled a low-cut, red blouse in his direction. Charlie knew the visible bra held more than her straining flesh.

Raising a penciled eyebrow, she started to ask his business. She didn't remember him. "What can I do—"

Charlie hit her.

"You punk!" she screamed and lashed out at him. Charlie rammed his left into the rounded bulge of the knit skirt and chopped viciously at the back of her neck as she doubled to the floor. Writhing at his feet, she clawed at his trousers until he kicked her head against the baseboard.

Four women in the shabby room watched horror stricken as Charlie stooped down and ripped open the red blouse. Reaching inside the brassiere, he pulled out a flat wad of bills.

"Take your two hundred apiece and get the hell out," he snarled, flinging the money at the terrified spectators.

One of them screamed and ran, her hands protectively at her swollen belly. The other three were picking up the fifties and hundreds when a man holding a surgical instrument entered from the adjoining room. He looked like a butcher in his soiled white coat.

"What's all the noise?" he demanded.

Then he saw Charlie standing over the battered fee collector.

His balding head turned scarlet as he lunged for Charlie. "You lousy two-bit punk," he roared slashing downward with his weapon. "I'll cut your goddamn heart out."

Charlie took the blow on his left forearm wincing as it sliced bone-deep. In one sweeping movement he slid the .45 from his pocket and slammed it against the man's left temple. He dropped the stained blade and staggered against the wall. Before he could regain his balance, Charlie smashed a knee in his groin and whipped the .45 barrel again and again into his face.

Blood was soaking Charlie's left sleeve and dripping onto the shattered features of the unconscious man on the floor. Charlie stood over him looking into his office. He could see a brown leather table, jointed and adjusted to raise the legs of a patient. On another table

were a variety of surgical instruments carelessly arranged and a pile of absorbent pads. He thought he heard the soft crying of a woman coming from the office.

All the icy knots were thawing and falling apart. But the treadmill of thoughts was running faster and faster. "Who's responsible — Thelma's dead — who's responsible — Thelma's dead—"

Charlie's eyes were blurring. His left arm hung limply at his side. He rubbed the back of his gun hand over his eyes and looked down at the figure on the floor. Slowly he raised the .45 until it hovered over the man's chest.

Then he squeezed the trigger four times. . .

He was standing there immobile when he heard the siren. All the protection of shock was gone. An uncontrollable grief racked him as he started down the stairs. Each step jarred fiery pain into his left arm. Each step jarred his only two thoughts into sharp focus.

At the bottom of the stairway, Charlie noticed the peeling remains of gold leaf lettering on the door. Dr. Joh— oles—. Spitting a curse, he blasted the glass into splinters with his remaining bullets. Then he dropped the empty automatic into his pocket.

As he stepped through the ruined door, police scurried for the cover of their squad car across the street.

Charlie's mind spun. "Who's responsible — Thelma's dead" hammered louder until it roared and screamed in his head. He tried to take a deep breath. But the raging torment drove him on.

He walked toward the police. "Everything's all right," he called hoarsely. "I'm comin' in."

Ten feet from the car he paused. .38 barrels stared at his chest.

"Don't come any closer. Put your hands on your head." The command was as menacing as the .38's.

Charlie seemed to relax. He almost smiled. Deliberately he jerked the .45 from his pocket. . .



Fantasy In Fingers

Mark Higgs, of the Oklahoma City police identification bureau, was bewildered when he began fingerprinting a suspect in a theft case. Higgs placed 54 year old Oran Telford's hands on the fingerprint card, which bears five spaces, and discovered there was a finger left over. He checked, and found that Telford had six fingers on each hand.

"That's nothing," Telford said. "I've got six toes on each foot." He removed his shoes and socks to prove it.

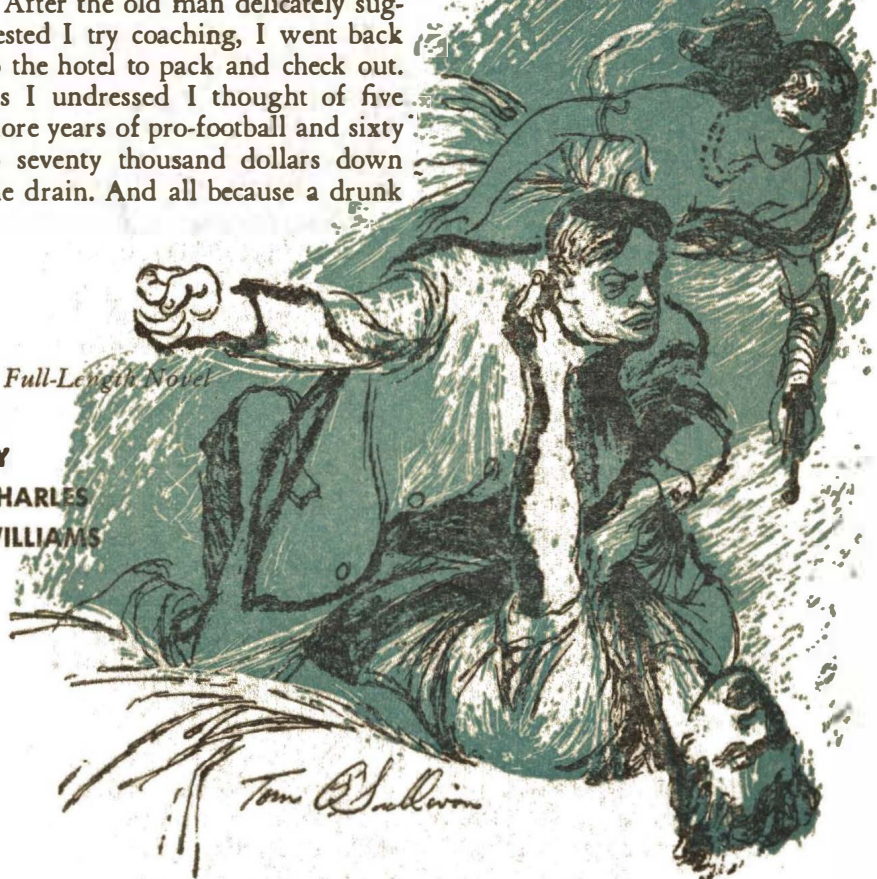
THEY SAID THE LEG was going to be as good as ever, but it wasn't. You could see that by the end of the first week of practice. I couldn't pivot and swing fast enough to go with the play even when I saw it coming, and they ran through me like B-girls through a sailor's bank-roll.

After the old man delicately suggested I try coaching, I went back to the hotel to pack and check out. As I undressed I thought of five more years of pro-football and sixty to seventy thousand dollars down the drain. And all because a drunk

The Big Bite

A Full-Length Novel

BY
CHARLES
WILLIAMS



A Hundred Grand, or his life. You don't live forever anyway, Harlan figured, and that kind of money was worth the gamble.

Copyright 1956 by Charles Williams

sideswiped me and knocked me off the highway. I swung my fist at the bum leg and knocked it off the luggage stand where it was propped. The big lump of muscle on the calf ridged up and it hurt as I walked into the shower. I stared bleakly at the white tile wall while the water poured over me. The dirty, sad, drunken, son—. There wasn't even any use cursing him. He was dead. He'd been killed in the same wreck.

I checked out before the squad came in from practice, caught a bus into Los Angeles, and sat around the airport until I could get on a plane going east. I didn't really know where I was going, and didn't care. I got off in New Orleans and for one of the few times in my life I went on a binge myself. It was a honey and lasted a week; when I began to come out of it I was in a motel somewhere on U.S. 90 out toward the Mississippi line with a girl named Frances. The third morning I got up while she was still asleep and caught a bus back to town. I didn't know what the answer was yet, but drinking wasn't it. I went over to Galveston and swam in the surf and lay in the sun on the beach until I'd cooked the booze out of my system. The fourth day I was there Purvis caught up with me.

I was staying at one of the beach hotels and was just coming in through the lobby in swim trunks and a terry cloth robe late

in the afternoon when a man reading a paper in one of the chairs got up and came toward me. He caught me just as I stepped into the elevator.

"John Harlan?" he asked.

"That's right," I said. "What can I do for you?"

"Purvis," he said. "Old Colony Insurance."

"Save yourself a trip," I cut him off. "I don't need any." But the elevator boy had already closed the door and we were going up.

Purvis shook his head. "I don't sell it. I'd just like to talk to you a few minutes, if you don't mind."

I shrugged. "You an adjuster?" I couldn't see why they'd be pawing through it now. The whole thing had been settled five months ago.

"Investigator," he said.

I looked at him then, for the first time, and knew I'd seen him somewhere before. He was about five-ten, and slender, with a built-in slouch, and appeared to be around 40 although the hair showing under the beat-up old felt hat was completely gray.

"You came to the hospital," I said.

He nodded.

The elevator stopped and I led the way down the corridor.

My room was on the south side, with a window looking out over the Gulf, but there was little breeze and it was breathless and hot.

Right off, he asked, "What did they give you?"

"Five thousand," I said. "And the hospital bills."

"You took the short end, pal."

"In another year or two I might have figured that out myself. Look. The leg had healed perfectly. I was up and walking. Not even a limp. The medics said it was as good as ever—."

"And when you reported for practice, it wasn't? You'd slowed down? You're not a professional athlete any more; you're just another taxpayer with two arms and legs. There's no shortage."

"So why keep kicking it around?" I asked. "The whole thing was settled months ago." Then I thought of something. "What's the name of your outfit again?"

"Old Colony Life."

"Hell, that wasn't the company—."

"No. Of course not. I thought you understood that. We didn't have anything to do with the liability he carried on the car. That was some California company."

"Then what's the angle? How'd you get in the act?"

"Life insurance. About a hundred thousand worth."

I stared at him. "I don't get it."

He sighed. "Cannon was insured with Old Colony—."

"I read you," I said. "That far. But what about it? He was insured. He's dead. You pick up the tab. Looks cut and dried to me."

"Let's say we're still a little curious as to how he died."

I stared at him. "Don't you read the papers?"

"Only the funnies. And today's horoscope."

"Everybody knows how he died. He was killed in the wreck when he sideswiped me and knocked me off the road."

"Just the same, suppose you tell me the whole thing again, the way you did at the hospital?"

"Sure," I said. "You figure maybe I walked over and knocked his roof in while I was pinned down with a crushed leg and a 4000 pound convertible sitting in my lap? I'll admit I was a little put out about it—."

He shook his head. "The whole thing, as nearly as you can remember it."

I sighed and lit another cigarette. "All right. It was just after dark. I was coming into town from that fishing cabin where I was camping, to see a movie. A mile or so after I got out on the pavement from the dirt road coming out of the swamp, a car came up behind me, going very fast. I was doing 50, so he must have been clipping it off around 65. There was no other traffic on the road, nobody in sight at all, so he had all the room in the world to pass me and then pull back into the right-hand lane, but instead he cut right in across my left front fender and knocked me off into the ditch. The car rolled a couple of times with me on the floorboards, but on the last one I

fell out—the top was down—and then it teetered on two wheels and fell back on top of me. He crashed, too. Just as I was going up and over the first time—while I was diving for the bottom—I saw his headlights swing in a big circle like somebody waving a flashlight around with his arm. After that I don't know how long it was before they got there with the wrecker and pulled the car off me, but it seemed like about two average lifetimes. I was out cold, at least part of the time."

"Did you hear anything during the time you were conscious?"

"Just night sounds. You know—frogs, things like that. No. Wait. Once I thought I heard him moaning or trying to call for help, from the other car."

He made a little gesture with his hand, and something in his eyes told me that was what he'd been fishing for all the time.

"But what of it? What difference does it make if he did groan or something?"

"You see the pictures of his head?" Before I could say anything he abruptly changed the subject. "You ever meet his wife? Widow, I mean."

"No."

"She never did come to see you in the hospital?"

"No. Her lawyer, and the insurance joker. That's all."

He looked thoughtful. "Did that ever strike you as a little odd. I

mean, her husband crashes into you and lays you up in the hospital for weeks and she doesn't even bring you a bunch of violets. They established the fact the wreck was entirely Cannon's fault, she didn't know but what you might sue the estate for steen million dollars, and still she wouldn't waste half an hour going out to the hospital to butter you up a little."

"As I said, her lawyer did."

"Not the same thing at all. This babe's a looker. How'd you happen to be up in that country anyway?"

"I like to fish. Do about a month of it each spring when I'm not working at some off-season job. A lot of bass in that lake, and the cabin belongs to an old friend, a guy I knew in college."

He nodded. "I see. Ever been there before this year?"

"Once. About three years ago. Just over the weekend."

"And you never did meet the Cannons? I thought maybe—that is, he had a camp out there too, not far from your friend's."

"Well, you might say I met *him*," I said wearily. "Or have we mentioned that? But as far as I know I've never seen her in my life. I don't even know what she looks like."

"Here, I've got a picture of her." He took it out of the inside pocket of his coat and handed it to me. "What'd you say?"

I looked at it. "Nothing," I said. She was a dream, all right, and

she was the same one. I was almost positive of that.

"Well?" he asked.

It was a hunch, but I played it. "Toothsome," I said. "But I never saw her before."

2.

When he was gone I took a quick shower and lay down on the bed with a cigarette. It was all crazy, but several things stood out like moles on a bubbledancer. The first was that Purvis believed Cannon hadn't been killed in that wreck, but had been murdered after the crash.

The next thing that stuck out was that it wouldn't make any difference at all as far as the insurance company was concerned whether he'd died in the wreck or been murdered by somebody after the wreck—unless the beneficiary of the insurance policy was involved in the murder. If somebody else tagged him out they still had to pick up the tab, as far as I knew. The beneficiary would no doubt be his widow. Therefore, he had his eye on Mrs. Cannon. After looking at the picture, I was pretty sure I knew why she hadn't come to the hospital to see me. She didn't want to come anywhere near me because she knew I'd seen her out there near the lake less than fifteen minutes before the wreck and would probably recognize her if I saw her again.

But why was Purvis digging into it after all this time? It had been five months. Surely they must have had to pay off on the insurance policy before this, and when they paid you'd think they would write it off and close it. It didn't make sense.

There was one more thing that didn't make a lot of sense, and that was why I'd told Purvis I'd never seen her. It was just a hunch, and I still wasn't sure why I'd done it.

I got up and dressed, and went out to dinner. When I got back, the phone rang. It was Purvis. He wanted to know if I had anything on the seat beside me, the night of the wreck.

"A bag of laundry I was taking into town," I told him.

"It was a pretty good-sized bundle, huh?"

"I'm afraid I've lost the check list," I said tiredly. "It was a whole bunch of stuff in a white laundry bag. Some sheets, blankets, and so on, from the cabin—."

"Uh-uh," he said slowly. Then he thanked me and hung up before I could ask him what this was all about.

I sat on the side of the bed and lit a cigarette. Reading was out of the question now, and sleep was impossible. I threw some clothes on and went out to get a cup of coffee. When I came back it was hours before I got to sleep. I kept thinking of the way Mrs. Cannon looked in that picture, and of the

money as a football pro she or somebody had cheated me of. I lit a cigarette and stared coldly at the match as I blew it out. You should have done it to somebody else, baby, I thought; I don't like having it done to me . . .

In the morning, after I'd had some breakfast, I came back to the room and put in a call to Houston. In a moment a girl's voice trilled, "Good-morning-Old-Colony-Life-Insurance-Company."

"I'd like to speak to Mr. Purvis," I said.

"There *used* to be a Mr. Purvis with us, but he left the company several months ago."

"Oh," I said. "I see—." It was a little fast, and it took me a moment to catch up. "Well, look—," I asked the girl for his address and she came up with one that was four months old.

I hung up and lit a cigarette. So that's the way it was. It explained a number of things, such as why the company was still pawing around in the mess months after they should have paid off on the policy. The company wasn't. They'd probably paid long ago and written it off as closed, but Purvis had gone into business for himself. Blackmail, extortion—call it whatever you liked. Something had made him suspicious when he'd gone up there to investigate, while he was still on the payroll. Maybe he'd never reported any of it, and now he was getting ready to put

the squeeze on somebody. He'd hoped to get a little more ammunition, so he'd come down to pump me again. If Cannon had crashed me deliberately, somebody in that mess had short-changed me about fifty thousand dollars, the way I saw it, and it was about time I found out who it was. Purvis knew, so what better place to start? I was just about to get with it, when he phoned.

He knew I'd called Old Colony and so he knew I was wise to the fact he no longer worked there and that any investigating he was doing now was strictly off the record and probably for the purposes of blackmail.

"I've got a little proposition in mind," he said, "if you think you'd be interested."

"I wouldn't know until I've heard it, would I?"

He hesitated. "I'm expecting a phone call; if I go out I might miss it. Would you mind coming up here?"

"No," I said. "Give me your address."

He told me and I wrote it down. "See you in a couple of hours," I said, and hung up.

3.

Purvis was dressed in a pair of gray slacks and a dark sports shirt with long sleeves. It was hot in the room in spite of the little fan whirling away, but he didn't sweat.

"Her husband crashed you deliberately," he said casually. "But I suppose you know that by now."

"Yes," I said. "Or maybe I was just supposed to be a byproduct. He could have been trying to kill her."

"Both of you, I think."

"What was it tipped you in the first place?" I asked. "There's nothing suspicious about a guy being found dead in a bad car smash-up."

He shrugged. "Be corny, and call it a sixth sense. I don't know what it is, but you get it after awhile if you keep going to these things long enough. You pull a hundred packages out of the file and they're all just about alike, but one of 'em will start you ringing like a burglar alarm. The first thing was the way his head was pushed in—."

"Well," I interrupted, "he did roll a car at 65 miles an hour. He figured to get bruised a little—."

"Sure," he said. "Sure. Then you got to consider, he wasn't drunk. At least, not nearly as drunk as everybody thought. So the only other alternative theory is that he deliberately tried to kill you. Mistaking you for somebody else, and the bag of laundry beside you for his wife. And if the people he really meant to kill were still out there at the lake—." He stopped and gave me a cold grin. "That's where you saw her, of course. Anyway, if they were still out there, which way

would they have to go to get back to town?"

"Right past where we crashed."

He spread his hands. "You see?" He studied me thoughtfully. "I gather from the fact you're here you might be interested in re-negotiating your settlement with Mrs. Cannon?"

"Right," I said.

"It'll be a little extra-legal, if you follow me."

"So it's extra-legal. It's money. Did she collect the insurance?"

He nodded. "And she's loaded, besides. Cannon left an estate that'll add up to somewhere around \$300,000, after taxes. No other heirs."

I leaned forward on the sofa. "All right. Go on."

"Say a hundred grand. Split 75-25."

"Seventy-five for me?"

He shook his head with a pained kind of smile on his face. "Seventy-five for me, chum."

"Back off and look again," I said. "The wind's whistling through your head. If you think you can do this alone, go ahead."

"You think I can't?"

"That's right. You need somebody who was right there when he was murdered and who might or might not have been completely unconscious all the time under that other car. It's a highly specialized field, and not many applicants could qualify."

"Well, let's table that discussion

for the moment," he said. I knew I'd hit him where it hurt. "How about a cold beer?"

"Sure," I said. I had him on the run now and all I had to do was keep the heat on him.

We went out through the door at the right. It led into the dinette and kitchen. He flicked on the light. The kitchen part was just a cubbyhole with a sink and a two-burner gas stove next to the wall. You couldn't see into the living-room from here. He opened the reefer and took out two bottles of imported beer. I think it was Danish. He uncapped them and set them on the drainboard of the sink. There was no window, and it was very hot under the light.

"You had more to go on than what you've told me so far, didn't you?" I asked casually. "I mean, beside that hole in his head and the fact he wasn't drunk."

"What makes you think so?"

I reached out with my left and caught the front of his shirt. Pulling him to me, I gave him the open right hand across the side of the face. "Let's have it now," I said. It was a mistake.

There was no resistance in him at all. He came right on up against me like a couple of old innertubes hanging off my arm, and when he got there he exploded. I had Purvis all over me. Fragments of flying Purvis hit me in the solar plexus and adam's apple at the same time. Just before the room went com-

pletely black I started breathing again, but I couldn't move.

Then I must have come out of it, for I heard a door chime and the door opening and voices. The door closed. Purvis had company. It was a man. I could hear snatches of what he was saying.

"Federal radio inspector . . . complaints of television interference . . . amateur transmitter in the neighborhood . . ."

"No, I haven't got a television set," Purvis said.

"Oh. Well, thanks."

"Not at—," Purvis began. His voice cut off with a shaky inward sucking of breath as if he had started to pull it in to scream, and then I heard the impact itself as if somebody had hurled a green watermelon against the wall. It was sickening. I froze up tight, forgetting my pain, and waited. Something slid softly to the floor, as if being helped. I heard footsteps coming toward the dinette. Something blocked off the light coming in from the livingroom, and I knew he was standing in the doorway. He seemed to fill it. I couldn't see him, because I was lying behind the serving bar and refrigerator. I waited, sweating with suspense. Would he come on in and look around into the kitchen side? I was helpless; he'd kick my head in like someone killing a snake. He stood there for a moment, and then I heard him turn and go away. It sounded as

if he were going into the bedroom. He came out again and I heard the desk drawer being pulled open. There was a rustling of papers.

I could move a little now, and managed to push myself up to my hands and knees. If he did come out here and find me I wanted at least to be on my feet. Purvis's feet and legs were in view, near the sofa. I slipped along the linoleum another two or three feet and peered around the edge of the doorway. He was standing in the front door. He was as big as a house. His back was turned toward me as he peered out into the hall, and he seemed to fill the doorway. He was bareheaded, and his hair was dark and brush-cut. He went out softly, pulling the door shut. I never had seen his face.

I staggered into the livingroom and stood looking down at Purvis. He lay on his back with his eyes open, staring blankly up at the ceiling. A terrible blow had made a mess of his head. I looked around to see what he had been hit with. There was nothing. The big guy must have brought it with him and then taken it away.

The whole thing had happened so suddenly I was having a little trouble catching up. The only thing I was sure of was that I had to get out of there, and fast. I was still groggy from that judo man-handling Purvis had given me, but this didn't look like the safest place in the world to recover.

I walked softly to the door and had sense enough to take my handkerchief in my hand as I turned the knob.

Then I was out in the street, weak and shaking a little as I turned the corner and went on. I told myself that I sure as hell wouldn't want to tangle with that big guy in a dark alley. He was about my size, and if he could match speed with Purvis—. I stopped.

I'd had to say it twice before it soaked in. I got it now, and it all matched perfectly. I was in business, if I didn't let him get behind me with, let us say, a piece of pipe.

4.

When I awoke the next morning my throat still felt as if a horse had stepped on it. That judo, I thought; they could keep it. Just give me good, clean, bone-crunching professional football where you could tell by looking at a guy about how hard he'd be able to hit you.

I turned these thoughts off like closing a tap and rolled out of bed. There was a lot to be done to get the show on the road, and if I didn't want *my* head pushed in, it had to be planned and executed with a hell of a lot of precision.

I put in a long distance call to George Gray in Fort Worth. I was lucky and caught him just as he was coming into his office in the

oilwell supply outfit he and his father owned. He was sorry to hear about my leg and that I was washed up with football. He even offered me a job, a salesman job.

"No," I said. "But thanks, George. I just want to get off by myself for a couple of weeks and sort it out a little. I thought I'd go back and finish that fishing trip, provided nobody's using the cabin."

"Say, that's fine. You're as welcome as the flowers in May, boy. I'll mail you a key. Okay?"

"That's what I was going to suggest," I said. "Mail it up there to Wayles, care of General Delivery. I can pick it up when I get in town."

"I'll get it off today. I sure hope you have better luck this time than you did the other. That was rugged."

"It's the breaks," I said.

We yakked a minute or two about old times in school. I wanted to ask him if he knew anything about Mrs. Cannon, but decided against it. I was supposed to be merely going fishing; there was no use starting anyone wondering.

I packed the two bags and checked out and caught the next bus to Houston.

It was a little after eleven when I arrived. I left the bags in two lockers in the station and went out. Early editions of the afternoon papers were on the street now. I bought one and ducked into an air-conditioned coffee shop to order

a hamburger and a glass of iced tea. There was no mention of Purvis. I tried to tell myself that what they'd done to Purvis, they wouldn't do to me. By the time they realized I was moving in on them they'd already be in the cage and all I'd have to do was drop the lid on them.

Maybe, I thought uneasily. Then I brushed it aside. There was too much to do and I was itching to get started. First, I went to a used-car lot. After considerable haggling I got a Chevvy tagged at \$595 down to \$475, with a free tankful of gas and an offer to clean the windshield.

I drove it around to a parking lot not too far from the bus station, and put the bags in. It was one-thirty. The next stop was a pawnshop. I picked up a second-hand portable typewriter—and a Colt .45 automatic. Then I stopped at a sporting goods store, after thinking it over, and bought a box of ammunition for the gun. I didn't like the idea, but this wasn't a child's game now. Stowing all this in the car, I looked up the biggest store in town that specialized in sound and recording equipment. I was there nearly two hours getting a thorough fill-in on tape recorders and trying out the different models. When I left I had a good one with a sensitive microphone designed for wide-angle pickup. I caught a cab and went back to the lot with it. After putting it in the trunk of

the Chevy I walked out to the corner again. A boy was calling the final edition of one of the afternoon papers. I bought one and sat behind the wheel as I shuffled through it. They had found Purvis. The police were convinced the murderer was a large man of great physical strength.

That was enough to start it rolling—the address and the fact they were looking for a big man. I hoped the cabbie who'd taken me to Purvis' address that night wasn't sitting behind his wheel somewhere in the city as I was, leafing through the paper.

Well, the ball had to bounce—one way or the other. But I couldn't sit here and waste time. I switched on the ignition and rolled out into the river of traffic. Mrs. Cannon, here I come.

5.

I tried to remember Wayles as I drove. It was small, a county seat, built in the old style around a square and a brick courthouse where pigeons cooed in the early mornings and made a mess of the red walls with birdlime at all times of the day.

It was odd now, to think I had been there for nearly five weeks and was still kind of vague about the actual layout of the square, but I hadn't lingered after I got out of the hospital. As soon as I was able to drive I'd just got into the re-

paired Buick and shoved off for Oklahoma City.

I passed the courthouse and slowed, and then I saw the hotel on the east side of the square, just where I vaguely remembered it was. The sign said Hotel Enders.

After registering, I went in search of my big man. It wasn't going to be easy. The population of the town would probably be between six and eight thousand, and this was Texas, where men grew tall. There'd be a lot of men the size of the one I was looking for.

The next morning luck was with me. I looked in at Cannon Motors. In addition to other things, I knew the late Mr. Cannon owned an automobile agency. The man there was the right size, but his hair was longer and it was the color of cotton. I went past the J. C. Penney store. Then looking through the plate glass of Tallant's Sporting Goods, I saw him. The right height and tremendous spread of shoulders. The small ears in close to the head, the short, crisp black hair. There was no doubt of it at all. I was looking at the man who had killed Purvis.

I'd located him, and identified him—all in a couple of hours of searching. Improbable, was it? A dream? Hell, it was turning into reality faster than I could keep up with it.

All right, all right, I warned myself, don't dislocate your shoulder

patting yourself on the back. There was plenty to do yet, and the tricky and dangerous part was just beginning. Mrs. Cannon was next, that brown-eyed Fort Knox.

Nine-thirty was a little early to go calling on a woman, especially unannounced, but that's the way it had to be. If I waited until later she might not be home, and if I phoned first I never would see her. I was the last person in the world she wanted to meet face to face.

I looked up her address in the telephone book. Three-twenty-four Cherrywood Drive, it said. At the first filling station I pulled in and gassed up. The attendant told me how to find Cherrywood Drive.

Directly across from the Cannon house was a vacant lot, grown up with pines, however, rather than weeds. I pulled the old Chevy to the curb on that side and walked across the street. The Cannon house was a long, low ranch style built of light-colored brick with a sweeping, low-angled white roof covered with broken quartz.

It was hot now and I could feel perspiration beginning to break out on my face. I went quickly up the walk. Remember, I told myself, you've never seen her before in your life. Sell her on it.

I rang the bell. I'd just started to reach for the bell again when the door opened. A young colored girl whose hair looked as if it had been plastered down with two quarts of marine glue stared out at me.

"Is Mrs. Cannon in?" I asked.

"I find out," she said boredly. "Who I say it is?"

"Mr. Warren," I said, mumbling a little.

When the girl came back, she said I could wait in the parlor. I followed her in through the entry hall and stood in the livingroom. "She be here in a minute," she said, and sauntered on out through a door at the right rear, which seemed to lead into the dining-room. As soon as she was gone, I looked swiftly around, trying to get as good a picture of the layout as I could before Mrs. Cannon arrived.

Apparently there was no dog. That had been worrying me. Approaching the house from the rear would be a cinch. Getting in, however, was going to be another matter.

I'd noticed something when I first stepped into the entry hall, but it hadn't actually registered until now. The house was air-conditioned. I could feel the coolness penetrating my sweaty shirt. That meant the doors and windows would be tightly closed all the time it was turned on, so it wasn't going to be merely a matter of unlatching a screen. It wasn't good. I glanced swiftly around, studying the room.

I saw that at each end of the sofa there was a table with a big, red-shaded lamp on it. The lamp cords disappeared behind the sofa.

I made a mental note I'd probably need a three-way outlet plug. There was a whispering sound like that of slippers on carpet. I turned just as Mrs. Cannon came into the room from the hallway.

When she saw me, she stopped. Her eyes widened a little, and I knew she recognized me. I didn't care now, because I was in, and I was too busy anyway trying to keep from staring at her to worry about it.

She was wearing bullfighter's pants and a white shirt with the sleeves rolled up; the blue-black hair was cut rather short and it swirled carelessly about a slender oval face the color of honey or good pale vermilion. If you had to look twice to be sure that wasn't Manolete inside those pants you were in bad shape and ought to see an optometrist or psychiatrist before you got any worse. The pants themselves were black and very smooth, and what they did to her thighs—or vice versa—should happen more often. In short, Mrs. Cannon was a large order of girl; she may have killed her husband, but I was willing to bet he'd never been bored when he was alive.

She recognized me; she was off guard for just an instant and I saw the sudden weariness in her eyes. Then she recovered and murmured politely, "Good morning, Mr.—ah—."

"Harlan," I said. "John Harlan."

"Oh," she said. "I thought Ger-

aldine said a Mr. Warren. I couldn't imagine—. Won't you sit down, Mr. Harlan?"

She flowed forward like warm honey poured out of a jug and took one of the big chairs facing the sofa. I remained standing until she was seated and then sat down on the sofa.

"I want to apologize for coming so early in the morning," I said, "but I'm on my way out to the lake to go fishing and didn't want to miss you."

"That's quite all right," she replied smoothly.

I had to hand it to her; she was as cool as they come. I know she was raging inside at that maid for not getting my name straight and at the same time she was probably going crazy trying to figure out—now that I had got in—whether I recognized her as the woman I'd seen out there at the lake, but none of it showed on her face.

We talked some more. And the way I flattered her, it was beginning to appear to her that I didn't know I'd ever seen her before, and the tension was easing.

And soon I was saying, "I wanted to come and see you after I got out of the hospital, but didn't know what there was I could say if I did come. I knew how badly you were torn up about it, too, and realized you didn't want to see me and be reminded of it—."

That ought to get her off the hook, I thought, so she could relax.

All I had to do now was ease her mind as to why I'd come back here, and I'd be in.

It was as if we were working off the same script. "It's quite all right," she said. "I'm glad you came. And I'm very sorry I didn't come to see you in the hospital, but it's nice to know that you understood—. However, I'll admit I was a little surprised at seeing you now. I didn't know you were back in this part of the country."

"I came back to finish that fishing trip," I explained. "Going to work on a new job in September."

"I was so very sorry to read that you had been—I mean, that you weren't going to play any more. Do you think the accident had anything to do with it?"

I shrugged. "No way to tell, actually. Just one of those things."

"I hated to hear it," she said.

Not half as much as you're going to hate it this time tomorrow, baby, I thought. And wondered how in the hell I was going to get in?

It was after she'd offered me coffee and had gone to get it that I saw the answer to the thing I was looking for. It was a glass door opening onto a patio. I'd been looking at it all the time but hadn't noticed it because it was behind a semi-transparent drape.

I could hear her talking to Esmerelda or whatever her name was out in the kitchen. I stepped swiftly across to the door and pulled back

the end of the drape. Opening it, I tried the knob from the outside. It didn't turn; the night latch was on. I reversed the push-button plungers in the edge of the door to unlatch it, closed it softly, and let the drape fall back in position. The door apparently wasn't used much, so the chances were she didn't bother to check it every night.

I walked back and sat down. In a moment she came in from the dining room with two cups of coffee and some cream and sugar on a tray. I did some more of the earnest young man about how sorry I was for the accident, even if it wasn't my fault, and she regretted some more that I was washed up in football.

And, finally, she said, "Well, I do hope I'll see you again while you're here."

I stood up on cue. "It's been nice meeting you," I said earnestly. "I probably won't come to town much, but if you're out my way, out at the cabin, stop in and go fishing with me. Hey, heh."

She smiled, the way you would at a meat-head who wasn't too bright, and came to the door with me. She'd call Tallant all right the minute the door was closed, but they'd just have a good laugh. I was utterly harmless.

I drove on around the corner and down the hill, casing the terrain, and went back to the hotel. I parked the car behind it and went shopping. I bought a small pencil

flashlight in a drugstore, and in Woolworth's I picked up a three-way outlet plug for a wall receptacle, some yellow second sheets for the typewriter, and a few sheets of carbon paper. Oh, yes, and wrapping paper, twine, some address stickers, and six bass bugs.

I walked back to the hotel, avoiding the south side of the square and keeping a lookout for Tallant. I didn't see him anywhere.

6.

I unlocked the door of the cabin and went in. Everything was just as I had left it. A deputy sheriff had come out and locked it after the wreck. The front room held a cookstove and a homemade pine table covered with oilcloth. Cooking utensils hung from nails in the wall behind the stove and there were some shelves of staple groceries. I unlatched and opened the small windows at each end of the room and went into the back one. Hunting and fishing clothes hung on nails all around the room. The trapped, dead air was stiflingly hot. I opened the windows, feeling my shirt sticking to me with sweat.

I didn't waste time, but got busy with the typewriter and paper. I dragged up a chair and sat down before the typewriter. It was deathly silent. I had this whole end of the world to myself and I was about to put down the highest-priced short piece of prose ever written.

It was an hour and a half before I had it all down the way I wanted, a little more than a full page, single spaced.

I read it over.

"To the District Attorneys at Houston, Texas, and Wayles, Texas," it began.

"My name is John Gallagher Harlan. I was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, July 10th, 1927, the son of Patrick and Marianne Harlan, both now deceased. I am a graduate of ——— University, class of 1949, and a former professional football player. I am six feet, three inches tall, and weigh two hundred and thirty pounds. There is a hirsute mole under my left shoulder-blade, and considerable scar tissue around and below my left knee. An examination of the bones of my left leg will show it was badly broken in two places, not very long ago. The bridgework, the result of teeth lost in football scrimmages, was done by Paul J. Scarff, DDS, Medical-Dental Building, San Francisco, California.

"The above data is unimportant except for purposes of possible identification and verification of the fact I actually existed, because if you receive this at all it will only be because I am dead. I will have been killed by Daniel R. Tallant and/or Mrs. Howard L. Cannon, both of Wayles, Texas.

"I do not know whether you will be able to find my body, or, in the event that you do, whether you will

ever be able to gather sufficient evidence to convict them, but this will assist you to the extent of explaining their motive. I was killed to prevent my disclosure of the following information:

"Both Mrs. Cannon and Mr. Tallant are already guilty of murder. Mrs. Cannon's husband did not die as the result of an automobile accident on the night of April 4th, 1955, as was believed, but was bludgeoned to death by Mr. Tallant, with Mrs. Cannon's connivance and/or assistance, shortly afterward as he lay unconscious in the wreckage of his car. I was present at the time, pinned under the side of my own automobile some sixty yards away. I heard the blow, but feigned unconsciousness to keep from being killed myself."

I went on to explain how I had seen her out there near the lake a few minutes before and how Cannon had driven me off the road because he believed I was Tallant and that she was in the car with me.

I wound it up:

"This will also clear up the death of Mr. Wilton L. Purvis of 10325 Caroline Street, Houston, Texas, on the night of August 8, 1955. He was attempting to blackmail the aforesaid two murderers on the strength of the evidence he had collected against them, and was himself killed by a single powerful blow on the head delivered by Mr. Tallant. I was present in the

apartment at the time, in the kitchen where I could not be seen from the livingroom or the doorway to the dining room. Mr. Tallant gained access to the Purvis apartment by posing as a Federal radio inspector investigating complaints of neighborhood television interference. In corroboration of the fact that I *was* there, I offer the following: Mr. Purvis was wearing a dark blue sports shirt and gray flannel slacks. There were two bottles of imported beer on the drainboard in the kitchen, opened but untouched.

"I am aware that none of the above is acceptable as evidence in a court of law, but I believe that, given the facts, you can eventually get a confession from them or enough evidence of your own to convict.

"Your inference as to why I withheld this information is correct. I *am* using it for extortion, to the extent of \$100,000. This disclosure, I realize, will tend greatly to discredit my story on the ground that I am a criminal myself, even if a first offender. There is another, and slightly more subtle, side to this, however, if you will consider it closely. I freely admit the attempted extortion; the mere fact that you are reading this guarantees I am dead. Therefore it is, in effect, a deathbed confession, and should carry some weight.

"Signed,

"John Gallagher Harlan."

I rolled in two fresh sheets of paper with a carbon between, and copied it very neatly, going slowly and making no mistakes. When I had finished I tore the originals into strips, wadded them up with all the discarded versions, and burned them in the cookstove. The two pages of the carbon copy I folded and left on the table. I closed the typewriter and put it away. So much for that.

There were two rolls of spare recorder tape in one of the bags. Removing them from the flat cardboard boxes they were packed in, I took them down to the edge of the lake and threw them far out into the water. They sank. Coming back to the kitchen, I put the six bass bugs I'd bought in one of the boxes, wrapped it with some of the brown paper, tied it with twine, and put on an address sticker. The other box was identical, and would look just the same when it was wrapped. I took both of them out to the car and put them in the glove compartment, along with the wrapping paper, address labels, twine, and a book of stamps.

I took the .45 automatic out of the bag, loaded the clip and inserted it, and put it in the car. It was late in the afternoon now. This time tomorrow I'd be well on my way to becoming rich, or any one or all three of us might be dead. I wasn't too nervous. I felt about the same way I always did standing in my own end zone on open-

ing kickoff while I watched the ball come sailing down toward me. I knew I was as ready now as I was ever going to be.

When I reached the Cannon house it was as dark and silent as the other houses in the neighborhood, but I made myself wait. Being caught in there would ruin everything. I thought I'd give her until three o'clock, anyway. She should be asleep then if she were going to sleep at all.

When the hands of the watch came up to three I was tense and eager. I set the recorder on top of the wall and climbed over, landing softly on the grass on the other side. Going slowly and avoiding the lawn furniture from memory, I eased up to the flagstone terrace outside the livingroom door.

I opened the door, stepped inside, gently closed the door, and pushed around the end of the drape. It was cool after the heat outside. The blackness was impenetrable. I switched on the flashlight and stepped across the room to the long, custom-built sofa.

I was working fast now, and silently, with all the moves worked out and memorized in advance. I secured the microphone in back of the sofa. Then I located the electrical outlet in the baseboard under the drapery of the window. Just as I had thought, it was a dual receptacle with both circuits in use by the big lamps at each end of the sofa. I inserted the multiple

plug in its place, and then plugged in the lamp and the recorder in two of its outlets. I put the recorder on the floor against the wall and set the controls, all except the on-off switch. Sitting on the end of the sofa, I reached back with my right hand. I could just touch the switch. I turned it on and brushed my fingertips against one of the spools. It was turning. The drape wasn't fouling it anywhere; everything should be all right. I turned it off again and stood up. Moving away a little, I swung the light around the end of the sofa to see if there was anything visible that would give it away. It was all right. The end table cut off any view behind the sofa.

Pulling back the drape, I slipped out of the house, closing the door gently behind me.

I stalled the rest of the night away. It was ten minutes of eight when I pulled to the curb in front of the Cannon house and wondered how easily people bluffed who had already committed two murders. The sun was higher now and growing hot; nothing stirred along the street except a dog making his morning rounds. I hurried up the walk. I leaned on the buzzer. I was just reaching for the buzzer again when the door opened.

I'd got her out of bed, all right. The dark hair was tousled and she was wearing a blue robe.

"Oh. It's you, Mr. Harlan. Aren't you up a little early—?"

"I've got to talk to you," I said curtly. I pushed on in. She stepped back, a little startled. I reached back to close the door behind me, and as I did I slid my fingers down the edge, found the two push-buttons of the night latch, and reversed them. She was watching my face and didn't see it.

You could see she thought all this was a little high-handed. "I beg your pardon—."

I cut her off. "Is the maid here yet?"

"Mr. Harlan, will you please leave this house? Before I call the police."

I caught the front of her robe. "Shut up. And listen. If the maid's here, get rid of her. If she's due within the next half hour, call her and tell her not to come. You wouldn't want her to hear this."

She was scared now. She moistened her lips. "She comes at nine."

"Good," I said. "Let's go into the livingroom, shall we? What kind of hostess are you, anyway?"

She was still having a little trouble trying to catch up. She'd typed me yesterday as a harmless yokel with two left feet, and now I'd crossed her up.

She stared at me as I took the folded yellow pages of the carbon copy from the breast pocket of my jacket. I held them while I finished lighting a cigarette. "Here," I said.

She unfolded them. I studied her face as she started to read. There was a hint of shock right at first,

and I knew that was when she saw the thing was addressed to the two District Attorneys.

"Mr. Harlan," she asked quietly, when she'd finished reading, "do you mind if I ask a rather personal question? Have you ever been confined in a mental institution?"

"Pretty good act," I said. "But you're wasting time."

"I mean it."

I sighed. "This is a nice routine, but we can skip the rest of it, if it's all right with you, and get on with the negotiations. I want a hundred thousand dollars. Do I get it?"

She stared at me. "You couldn't be serious."

"I'll read the score to you," I said. "Your husband deliberately tried to kill me because he thought I was Tallant, and he wound up by putting a permanent wave in one of my legs. They may not look like much compared to Grable's, but I made a damn good living with them, and now I don't any more. He left you a hundred thousand dollars in insurance, but that was just a clerical error. He should have left it to me. I've come after it. Do I get it, or don't I?"

She stared at me. "You have a wonderful imagination, Mr. Harlan, even if it is slightly deranged. My husband was drinking. He lost control of his car—."

I cut her off. "We've wasted enough time. Get Tallant on the phone. I'll tell you what to say."

"You mean the Mr. Tallant who runs the sporting goods shop?"

"Among other things, that's the Mr. Tallant. Now get with it."

She tried to bluff it out. For an instant her eyes locked with mine, but then they dropped. She lifted the receiver and dialed.

7.

"Just say something's come up," I ordered, "and that he's to get over here as fast as he can. Not another word."

She stared coldly. In the dead silence of the room I could hear the phone ringing at the other end. It stopped.

"Mr. Tallant?" she asked. "This is Mrs. Cannon. Something has come up, and I wonder if you could drive over here right away—."

I pressed down the plunger on the cradle to break the connection.

We waited after that. Nobody said anything. The silence went on building up so that when the door chime tinkled out in the kitchen it was like a hand-grenade going off.

She turned and started toward the entrance hallway. The instant she was through the door I reached down behind the sofa and flipped the switch of the recorder. Then I sprang up and followed her. I was leaning against the door frame between the livingroom and the entry hall when she opened the door. Tallant was standing on the porch.

We were almost the same size exactly, but he could have been a year or so younger and you had to admit he was a handsome devil. Whether you were after the same girl or the same fumble, he'd give you a bad time either way.

"Come in, Mr. Tallant," she said.

He stepped inside the entry hall. As she closed the door he inclined his head a little in my direction and said, "Who's this?" It wasn't too convincing. He knew who I was, all right.

I lounged against the doorframe and watched his face. "I'm a Federal radio inspector," I said. "Checking up on television interference in the neighborhood."

He was good, all right, and he'd been prepared, but that was a little too hot to field without showing it.

"Say, what the hell is this?" he asked roughly. "Who are you? And what do you want?"

I waved a hand. "The letter on the coffee table, Tallant. Why don't you just pick it up and read it? It'll explain everything."

He shrugged indifferently and walked over to the coffee table, picked up the folded yellow sheets, and sat down on the end of the sofa where I'd been. She lit a cigarette with studied arrogance and perched on the arm of one of the big chairs. I watched his face as he read. The mouth grew ugly. When he finished he looked up at me, his eyes hard.

I stood back out of reach and

gave them the pitch, straight down the middle and smoking. "All right. A friend of mine has two originals of the carbon you've just read, both signed. If anything happens to me, they go in the mail, one to the District Attorney at Houston and the other to the DA here. They'll have three murders to work on, and you can figure out for yourselves what the odds are that they'll be able to burn you for at least one. All I want is a hundred thousand dollars, which is exactly what you collected from the insurance company. There's plenty more, and none of it would do you any good in Death Row. So how's it going to be?"

While I was talking Tallant had got hold of himself again, and now there was only a nasty smile on his face as he looked at me. "You mean you've got the guts to try to shake Mrs. Cannon down with a pipe dream like this?"

"Never mind the hokum," I said. "The question is do you want the police to have this?"

He lit a cigarette and shrugged. "If you think the police will take the word of a blackmailing creep like you against a woman of her standing, go ahead and shove your nipple in the wringer."

"That's your answer, is it?" I said, making it come up tough.

"That's our answer."

It was time for a little bluster. "All right, friend. I'll be around, and when you start making sense

you can get in touch with me. I'm a bargain, but you'd better hurry and make up your minds before the price starts going up."

I picked up the letter and let myself out the front door. It was 8:25. I waited up the street until I thought they had had enough time and then I went back. I went silently up the walk, carefully turned the knob on the front door, pulled it open, and went in fast.

I could hear Tallant's voice sounding angry in the livingroom. It chopped off abruptly, and I knew they had heard the front door open. As I came striding through the doorway from the entry hall they whirled and stared at me.

Tallant recovered first. His face hardened and he took a step toward me. "We told you once, Harlan—."

I took the .45 out of my pocket and pointed it at him. "Turn around," I ordered. "Go to the other end of the room and sit down on that hearth."

After a little more coaxing, he obeyed. She remained where she was, near the window.

I stepped forward, still holding the gun in my right hand. With the left I picked up the red-shaded lamp on the end table and dropped it on the sofa. Sliding the table out of the way, I pushed the end of the sofa away from the wall and reached behind it. They froze dead still now and stared as if hypnotized. I watched them as I lifted the recorder into view.

She gasped, and I thought for a second she was going to fall. In the sudden, taut silence that followed, he began to get up slowly from the hearth with deadliness quite naked in his eyes. I had them. I had them, that is, if I got out of here alive with that tape.

"Just stay where you are, both of you, and nobody'll get hurt," I said.

8.

The first voice to come out of the loudspeaker was Tallant's.

"He's gone!"

Mrs. Cannon: "Dan! What are we going to do?" There was a gasp and a rustle of cloth as they embraced.

Tallant: "Joyce, for Christ's sake, relax! There's nothing to get excited about. He's just bluffing—."

Mrs. Cannon: "*I told you!* I told you to go back and see if he was still unconscious under that other car. Why didn't you listen—?"

Tallant: "Will you shut up for a minute? I tell you he was out the whole time. He's guessing, and making it up. He got the idea from Purvis. Purvis must have described you, and he realized it was you he saw out there on the road in the swamp."

Mrs. Cannon: "And why in the name of God didn't you make sure there was nobody else in the apartment before—?"

Tallant: "It's still just his word against mine—"

Mrs. Cannon: "*Word!* For the love of heaven, can't you see that if the police even suspect for a minute you were there they'll see the whole thing?"

Tallant: "Look, he won't go to the police. How can he?"

Mrs. Cannon: "Of course he's not going to the police, because we're going to pay him off.

Tallant: "Are you crazy? Pay him off? Don't you know any better than to give in to a blackmailer? Once you give him a nickel, he'll bleed you for the rest of your life."

Mrs. Cannon: "Maybe you have a better suggestion."

Tallant: "You're damn right I do."

Mrs. Cannon: "No! *We can't—*."

Tallant: "The hell we can't. He's asking for it, the same as Purvis."

Mrs. Cannon: "But suppose he's telling the truth about the other copy of that letter?"

Tallant: "He's not. That's an old dodge."

Mrs. Cannon: "But, Dan! We don't *know*. We can't take the chance."

Tallant: "There's no other way, I tell you! The thing to do is bluff him and stall for time until we're sure. Then get rid of him. We've got to go ahead—"

Mrs. Cannon: "Purvis. And now this one. Oh, God, will there ever be an end to it?"

Tallant: "We'll never be safe as long as he's alive. You know that."

Mrs. Cannon: "Yes. You're right."

But we've got to be sure, first. I mean, that he's the only one."

Tallant: "Do you think a pig like Harlan would divide anything with anybody? He's in it alone. He wouldn't trust anybody else."

Mrs. Cannon: "It's so dangerous. If we guess wrong—"

Tallant: "Stop it! Stop it! Leave it to me. I can outguess a thug like that—. Shhhhhh!" There was the sound of the front door opening and closing, and then Tallant's voice saying, "We told you once, Harlan—."

That was all of it.

Brother, I thought, it's enough. Once that was out of their reach I could write my own ticket.

Tallant had started to get up. He stared at her, his eyes hard. "How did he get that in here? Don't you even know what goes on in your own house?"

"Sit down," I said. "I planted it last night after she'd gone to bed. Now. Both of you stay right where you are. This is not going to cost you anything but money, and you've got plenty of that, so play it safe and don't take any chances."

"I'll get you, Harlan," he said.

I nodded toward the machine. "I heard you the first time."

He remained crouched, estimating his chances.

"Sit down," I said again. He slowly settled back on the hearth.

The room fell silence again. I flipped the machine onto rewind and put all the tape back on one

spool. Lifting it off, I put it in the empty cardboard box that I took from my pocket. With the wrapping paper and twine, I made a shipping parcel of it. They continued to watch me like two big cats. I stuck on an address label, but left it blank. Finally I put on some stamps and shoved it into the breast pocket of my jacket alongside the other package containing the bass bugs. They were identical except for weight.

I stood up with the gun in my hand again. "Toss me your car keys," I said to Tallant. I had to coax him, of course, before he came across.

I motioned at her with the gun like somebody in a western movie. "Now your keys, honey. You're driving me to town."

Her face was white as chalk, but she defied me. "Do you think I'd go out of the house dressed this way?"

Women, I thought. "Never mind the way you're dressed. You won't have to get out of the car."

And she didn't have to. When we got to the postoffice there was another car in front of the drive-in box and we had to wait a minute. Taking out my pen, I printed George Gray's address on the sticker. I held the parcel so she couldn't see the address. The other car pulled away and she moved up. She turned her head a little and watched without expression as I reached out and dropped it into the

slot sticking out over the curb.

"There it goes, honey," I said. "You've had it."

When we got back to the house, the first thing she did was to tell Tallant that I'd mailed it.

He stared and said nothing.

I lit a cigarette and waved the match at them. "Anybody want me to draw him a picture? If not, let's get on with the business."

He started to open his mouth, but was interrupted by the sound of the door chime. It was Pearline or whatever her name was. She had a new varnish job on her hair and was idling her chewing gum in second gear. I persuaded her to duck over to a grocery and buy a dozen eggs for Mrs. Cannon's breakfast.

I went back into the livingroom. They hadn't moved. Tallant looked up at me. "You don't think you're going to get away with this?"

I sighed. "You're a hard man to convince, pal. But if you insist, I'll make the spiel. Here goes.

"You're dead, both of you. You had two ways out; you could pay me off, or if you were sure there wasn't anybody else with another copy of that letter you could kill me. That last has just been answered for you. The whole thing is on the tape, in your own words, and she just now saw me put it in the mail. All I want is to be paid, for being run over that night. Give me mine, I kiss you both for luck and fade."

"You dirty bastard," Tallant said, "You think I'm going to hold still for this?"

"You kidding? What the hell are you holding still for? She's paying the freight, isn't she?"

"Who said she was?"

"She did, as I recall. But we can ask her again." I turned and looked at her. "How about it, baby?"

She stared coldly for an instant, but then she nodded. She was a realist, that girl.

"You'll get it," she said.

It was as easy as that.

After Tallant went off in a man-sized huff, I got down to business details with Joyce.

She tried without success to get my price down and then she said, "It'll take about a week, and it can all be handled in Houston, which should be safe enough as far as gossip is concerned. I have securities sufficient to cover it. I'll place a sell order with the brokerage firm down there, and they'll give me a check for the proceeds. I deposit the check in a Houston bank, and when it clears, draw out the cash and give it to you. They may wonder at it, but not seriously. Banks deal with eccentrics all the time."

She could have been figuring her share of a luncheon tab. "You're an unflustered tomato," I said.

She shrugged. "I learned to face facts very early in life. Where will you be? Here in town?"

"No. Out there at the fishing camp. It'll look better that way. Now, let's see. This is Thursday, right?"

She nodded.

"Well, how about a week from today in Houston? Think you can do it by then?"

"Yes. And can you have the tape back from your fellow thug by that time?"

"I think so." I started for the door. Just before I went out it, I turned and said, "Remember, if anything happens to me you and Tallant both will land in Death Row."

Before going to the cabin, I went down an old logging road and buried the tape in a vine covered, rotted stump, waterproofing it first with plastic wrapping secured by a couple rolls of Scotch tape.

I went in for a swim. And then lay down on the pier. Four days' tension unwound inside me like a breaking clock spring, and I went to sleep.

I didn't know what waked me. I opened my eyes and Joyce Cannon was standing beside my legs looking down at me.

"Hello," I said.

She nodded. "Hello."

I rubbed a hand across my face. "What progress with the money?" I asked.

"I called the broker in Houston and gave him a list of securities to sell. The proceeds will be deposited to my account in the bank down

there next Tuesday. "I must say you have masterly grasp of black-mail's intricacies."

"Thank you. I like your legs."

"You don't have any trouble with the moral aspects?"

"No. I'm a bastard. I admit it."

"Frank, to say the least."

"Look. It's a jungle. They throw you into it naked, and sixty years later they carry you off in a box. You just do the best you can."

I offered her a beer at this point, and we headed down the pier.

She led the way toward the car instead of the front porch of the cabin. I stood behind her as she opened the right front door. "Something I wanted to get," she said, reaching into the glove compartment.

There was an overnight bag on the floor in back. She turned and saw me looking at it.

"I was—I mean, I'm going to Dallas to visit friends over the weekend," she said.

"Hot there, this time of year," I said.

"Yes. Isn't it?"

We went up on the porch. "Make yourself at home. I'll change out of these trunks and open a couple of cans."

I went through into the back room, took off the swim trunks, and put on shorts and a pair of flannel slacks. Just as I was shoving my feet into sandals she came in. She leaned against the door frame, holding a cigarette in her

fingers, and swept an amused glance around the room at the beds and the duck-hunting clothes hanging along the walls.

"Very cozy," she said. "A little crude—but masculine."

I tossed the trunks across a chair and stepped toward her. She didn't move out of the doorway. I leaned an arm against the frame above her head and stood looking down at her.

"Long drive," I said.

She tilted her head back. "Yes. Isn't it?"

9.

It was dark in the room. She stirred languidly beside me on the narrow bed and sat up, groping on the table for a cigarette. The big match flared, revealing her nakedness. She couldn't have cared less.

"Oh," she said. The hand carrying the match stopped its movement a little short of the end of the cigarette.

"What is it?" I asked.

She lit the cigarette and waved the match to put it out. "It's on the table in the other room," she said.

"What is?" Then I remembered she had taken something from the glove compartment of the car.

"The envelope. With the money in it."

"Money?"

"Partial payment. I had eight thousand available, and since I had to give it to you sooner or later—,"

"That's nice," I said. I got up and went into the other room. Striking a match, I located the envelope on the table and opened it. It was a big 9 by 12 manila type, and inside were a lot of loose bills plus two blocks of fifties. The match burned down and scorched my fingers while I stared. I tried to imagine what a hundred thousand would look like. It would be a little over twelve times as much. I struck another match and carried it into the back room. When I put the envelope on the table beside the bed some of the money slid out. I looked from it to her in the flickering light.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Color scheme," I said. "Make a great painting. *Nude brunette with eight thousand dollars.*"

She smiled mockingly. "Ah, your esthetic side." Her voice went on. "I think we're a lot more alike in some ways than either of us would care to admit."

Women, I thought. They yakked all the time except when they were being laid or asleep. I stretched out beside her, and shut her up with the old classic method of turning off the yak. It was all right with her.

We stooged around the cabin all the next day, and late in the afternoon we sat on the front porch drinking beer.

"What about Tallant?" I asked. "Does he think you're in Dallas?"

"I suppose so. But does it matter?"

"No. Except he might blow his stack if he found out where you really were. What'd you do—get tired of him? Tallant, I mean."

She leaned back on her elbows and regarded me thoughtfully. "He does tend to get a little intense and possessive. And maybe I could like you better."

"Sure, sure," I said. "Have all the fun you want, but let's don't get too careless, shall we?"

That was Friday afternoon. Saturday morning at ten, while we were drinking coffee in the front room, he walked in on us. He was carrying a gun in his right hand, and he was wired and set to go off.

For some reason—probably just dumb luck—she was dressed, for a change. For the best part of two days she'd been lying around like an oyster on the half shell. If he'd happened to walk in on us in the sack or while she was lying around in nothing but her nail polish, he might have killed us both before we could open our mouths. As it was, it was bad enough.

He hadn't shaved for two or three days, and his eyes had the wild, staring look of a man who was going to swing at the next cockroach that laughed at him.

He took a slow step into the room. "So you went to Dallas," he said harshly.

She shrugged. "I started to Dallas, but you might say I changed my mind. It looked as if it might be more fun to stay here." She smiled

sweetly. "And do you know, it was. I've been having a wonderful time."

I took a chance and breathed, hoping he wouldn't notice I was still alive. Maybe he'd just kill her and go away. I wanted to kill her myself.

He walked slowly over to the table and stood looking down at her with the veins standing out on his temples. The gun lined up with her face. "Look up here," he said. "Look up at me, you roundheeled bitch—."

She glanced up calmly. "Yes, dear? And what are you going to do?"

If she'd only shut up—. He was still talking, so maybe there was a chance. But oh, for the love of God, couldn't she keep her stupid mouth shut for a minute?

Without any warning, he cracked. He looked around helplessly, like some big, tortured kid, and said, "Why? Why did you do it?"

"Get out," she said contemptuously.

"Joyce—." He dropped the gun to the floor and stood with his chin on his chest. "Joyce—." Turning, he ran out the door.

I picked up the gun and went out on the porch. He was stumbling along the road and in a moment he entered the wall of timber at the edge of the clearing and was out of sight. His car would be back up there somewhere.

She came up beside me and put an arm across my shoulders. I

turned, caught the front of her blouse, and slapped her across the face with the back of my hand. She cried out and stepped back.

I wiped the sweat off my face with a hand that was still shaking, and walked past her into the back room. Throwing the big suitcase on the bed, I began tossing clothes into it. She came back and stood in the doorway.

"What did you do that for?" she asked.

I straightened with a shirt in my hand. "Go ahead. Get yourself killed. But you can leave me out of it."

She shrugged. "He's harmless."

"Sure, sure," I said. "He's harmless. He's only killed two men so far. I'm getting the hell out of here while I'm in one piece."

Her eyebrows arched. "Well! And what about me?"

"The hell with what about you. You meet me in Houston Thursday at noon with that money, the way you're supposed to. In the meantime, try the Marine Corps."

She flared up. "Don't talk to me that way!" But she cooled off fast. "I'm sorry," she said, her big eyes contrite.

With Tallant loose, what was I thinking about, going off and leaving her? That was stupid; the thing to do was take her with me so I'd know damn well she would still be alive Thursday morning.

I walked over to her. "I'm sorry, too. Guess he scared me a little."

She looked up at me with an eager smile. "Why don't we go away somewhere, if you don't want to stay here?"

"That's the ticket. Just the two of us, like a honeymoon."

10.

It seemed strange that the battery in my car should be dead, but it was. So we decided to go in her car.

We drove to Shreveport. When we checked in at the hotel she waited impatiently until the bell-hop got his tip and left; then she came close to me, put her hands up behind my neck, smiled delightfully, and said, "Isn't this nice?"

We didn't leave the room for 24 hours. We had our meals sent up.

We did go to a movie Sunday afternoon and out to dinner afterward. When you've reached the saturation point in love-making, there's nothing you can get as sick of as being shut up for any length of time in a hotel room with a woman, but I had to hand it to her, she was good-natured all the time.

On Monday she wanted to go shopping, and nothing would do but that I go with her.

She kept me up most of the night, yakking and being very sweet and chummy and giving me the old buildup, so it was late when I awoke on Tuesday morning, some time after ten o'clock. She was still

asleep beside me, wearing the new shortie nightgown she'd bought. Suddenly the whole thing didn't ring true. With her equipment, she didn't have to break a leg scrambling into the sack with a guy who was putting the bite on her for a hundred grand? I wasn't that good.

My hand hung halfway to a cigarette pack, while an idea raced through my mind. It figured from every direction. You fool, they almost had you. Almost. But not quite.

It had been close, though, if I were right. This was Tuesday. I had been with her since Thursday afternoon, been with her every minute. She'd seen to that. She knew every move I'd made and that I hadn't been in contact with anybody. That would account for the fact that my car wouldn't start. Tallant had butched it some way that first night to make sure that if I went anywhere it would only be with her—and it would explain this whole lovey-dovey routine on her part. They simply didn't believe there was anybody else in this thing with me, and when they had finally proved it to their own satisfaction they'd knock me off.

They weren't sure I had mailed the tape, or if I had, that I had mailed it to an accomplice. Every hour that went by without my getting in contact with *somebody* to assure him I was still alive made my position more dangerous. Thank God I'd caught on in time.

She awakened then and asked me if I liked her. I told her that I did. She sat up in bed, stripped off the nightgown with casual unconcern and strode naked into the bathroom. She left the door just partly open, as she always did, and started yakking as she turned on the shower about whether I liked her or not.

I lifted the cradle of the phone and told the operator I wanted to make a long-distance call.

The yakking paused momentarily on a questioning note.

"Sure, sure," I answered, holding my hand over the mouthpiece.

"Well, that's better. I think you're sweet, too."

I took my hand off the transmitter and spoke directly into it, very quietly. "Fort Worth. Person-to-person to George Gray at the Gray Midcontinent Equipment Company." Then putting my hand back over the transmitter, I shouted to Joyce, "Stop the yakking for a minute, will you. I'm trying to make a telephone call. And turn off the shower."

The shower stopped abruptly. The door opened and she came out, naked, beautiful, and dripping, with a big towel in her hand. "A telephone call?" she asked with big-eyed innocence. "To whom, John?"

I smiled. "Long distance. To a friend of mine. You may have heard me speak of him."

"Oh," she said, with no surprise

in her voice and no change of expression. The world lost a great actress, I thought.

Just then George's voice sounded in the receiver. "Hello? Gray speaking—"

"John," I said. "How are you, boy?"

"Well, you old son-of-a-gun," George said. "It's good to hear from you. How's fishing?"

I looked at her. "Fine," I said. "It's been very good. I just thought I'd let you know everything's under control here, and that the trip has been very successful. We've made ourselves a deal, boy."

"Then you will go to work for us—?"

"Sure," I said. "Right away. Next Thursday, in fact. Here's the scoop. I'm going down to Houston Thursday morning and I'll be at the Rice Hotel by about eleven. I'll get in touch with you from there about the details of the deal. I won't take up any more of your time right now. See you, George."

"Fine," he replied. "Goodbye."

I hung up.

"That *was* your fellow thug, wasn't it?" she asked in a matter-of-fact tone.

I stared at her, and then I caught on that I'd just put on all that show for nothing; it had never occurred to her to doubt I was telling the truth about an accomplice.

I grinned at her. "Honey," I said. "You're cute. And you're stacked."

She smiled, and dropped the

towel across the back of a chair as she looked down at herself. "How did you ever guess?" she asked.

We checked out of the hotel late Wednesday afternoon and started back. I drove. The whole thing had been so easy it was ridiculous and now all that remained was picking up the money.

"After we've finished the business in Houston, wouldn't you like to go down to Galveston?" she asked. "For just a few days?"

I started to open my mouth to tell her to get herself a new boy when it occurred to me there was no sense antagonizing her at this stage of the game.

"Sure," I said. "That would be wonderful. We'll spend the weekend down there." After all, as soon as I got my hands on that money I could fade and there was nothing she could do about it. Mazatlan, on the west coast of Mexico, had been buzzing around in my head for a long time. The thing to do was drift down there, shack up with some babe to learn the language, and keep an eye open all the time for the good thing.

She was saying something again. "What?" I asked. I pulled out to pass a truck, and came back in the lane again.

"I said I'll have to stop at the house when we go through town and pack another bag. I'll need beach things."

"Oh," I thought about it. Well, why not? It'd be dark; nobody

would see me with her if she pulled right into the garage. And while we were at the house she could use the phone to get a line on Tallant's whereabouts before we went out to the camp to get my car started with the new battery I'd picked up.

"Sure," I said.

We stopped to have dinner on the way, and it was a little after nine PM when we came into Wayles. She was driving then. When we came up past the side of the Cannon house it was dark and the whole area was quiet.

Once we were inside the house I got jittery.

"Go on," I said. "Get the lead out, will you?"

She started across the livingroom toward the hallway leading to the other wing of the house. Then she stopped and turned. "You'll have to reach down the bag for me," she said. "It's on a shelf in one of the bedroom closets."

"Okay," I said. I followed her.

The hallway turned at right angles. Beyond that it was very dark. I stayed close behind her, holding her arm so I wouldn't bump into the walls. "Where's the light?" I asked impatiently.

She stopped. "John—," she said softly. "Let's stay here tonight. We could go out there early in the morning and still be in Houston by noon."

"No—."

"Please!" Her arms came up around my neck. She pulled my

head down and her lips were against mine.

I suppose it's pure reflex. My arms tightened around her.

A light switch clicked and the room was full of sudden light. I whirled, taking her with me part of the way until she pushed hard against my chest, spun outward, and fell. Tallant was sitting cross-wise in an overstuffed chair near the door we'd come in. His legs were hanging over the arm, and a pump shotgun was balanced across his knees.

He gestured slightly with one hand. "Nice work, Joyce. Move to your left and stay down."

II.

She moved across the shaggy white rug on her hands and knees, toward the dressing table beyond the foot of the bed.

"Sit down, Harlan," he ordered.

"Look—."

"This is a 12-gauge, loaded with 4's. It'll cut you in two."

I sat down on the side of the bed.

It had all happened a little too suddenly for me. One thing was obvious, though. He wasn't crazy; the whole thing had been planned by both of them, and that business out at the cabin was in the act.

And they weren't convinced I'd mailed the tape, Tallant let me know right off. Or that I had an accomplice.

"And just when was the last

time this accomplice of yours heard from you?" Tallant asked me.

"It was around ten-fifteen yesterday morning."

"Oh, we know you made that call," he said. "The thing I'm questioning is whether the man you talked to even knew anything about this."

I felt a shiver go up my back.

He smiled coldly. Still holding the gun across his knees with his right hand, he reached into his jacket pocket with his left and brought something out. I stared. It was a roll of recorder tape.

"Great machine, the recorder," he said. "Private detectives use them, too. Your telephone in that hotel room was bugged."

Then he had *both* sides of the conversation.

He must have seen it in my face. "You're so right, Harlan. Gray didn't even know what you were talking about, as near as I can gather. He thought you were referring to the job he offered you. I don't know what was actually in the package you sent him, but obviously it wasn't recorder tape. So let's hear your story, and you'd better make it good."

I tried to pull myself together and get my mind to work. Only one thing was clear. The moment they were absolutely certain I was alone in this thing they'd kill me like erasing a mistake in a letter.

I leaned forward and tried to make my voice sound tough. "My

story? It's exactly the same thing I told you from the first. You know that roll of recorder tape will hang you. Now, if you want to take a chance I'm lying about it, go ahead."

"We're not in as much immediate danger as you think," he said.

"Bat sweat."

"I'm serious. Just listen for a moment. Let's say, for the sake of argument, that you're telling the truth. We grant you an accomplice."

"That's nice of you."

"What, specifically, does he stand to gain by turning the tape over to the police? What the hell does he care about you, or what happened to you? He's not a relative, because you have none. We checked."

"He's a friend of mine—."

"Don't be ridiculous. In your business, friends are expendable."

"So what does he stand to lose? Eight cents worth of stamps."

They exchanged glances. "What does he stand to lose?" he asked. "Really, Harlan. He stands to lose a hundred thousand dollars. Yeah. By turning that tape over to the police, instead of cashing in on it himself."

I tried to say something. I couldn't.

He continued. "So what happens? Nothing, in our opinion. Except that sometime in the future, after you have disappeared completely, your friend comes sidling

up to us with the same old sad story."

I got myself started at last. "So what have you accomplished? You have to pay him off."

He shrugged. "Perhaps. If you do have an accomplice, we're probably ruined, because the thing becomes an endless chain and could go on forever. But we haven't got any more to lose by waiting for him than we have by being suckers and paying you now. We're going to keep you here. Nobody saw you come in. Nobody knows where you are. As far as the rest of the world is concerned, you've already disappeared, and could be dead."

I felt cold all over. "You can't get away with it."

"I think so," he replied calmly. "We're going to find out exactly what would happen if you turned up missing. Before you actually do, that is."

12.

I didn't have a chance; they had me cut off from every direction. They were pretty sure right now I was the only one in on this thing, and as soon as they were convinced of it they'd get rid of me. Every hour that passed without someone else's showing up was making them more certain. And nobody else was going to show up.

The cold voice went on. "Your car has been abandoned in New Orleans. The cabin is closed; your

gear and fishing tackle are gone. Harlan, you've disappeared. You didn't even leave a ripple. And nobody gives a damn."

"George Gray—."

"So you won't call him Thursday. He'll ask the Governor to order out the National Guard, won't he? He offered you a job; you accepted it, and then changed your mind. He's going to get excited about that?"

The room fell silent again as they glanced at each other. I tried to think. I couldn't come up with anything. There had to be a way out. But where was it?

"Nobody saw you come in here," he said, "and nobody'll ever see you go out. The maid has a week off to visit her family in Louisiana."

A week. Sometime within a week.

"It isn't merely a question of the tape. We think you hid that somewhere. I've looked for it, and can't find it. The chances are, nobody'll ever find it. It's you. We're in this too deep to have anyone running around loose who knows about it. Get up."

Tallant and his gun escorted me to another room. It was a bedroom, smaller than the other. It had one window opposite the door, but there were heavy drapes over it and they were drawn. There was a single bed with its head up against the wall under the window, and a night table stood beside it.

"Lie down on the bed," he said.

I lay down. She came past him and around to my left side. Reaching down, she picked up a pair of handcuffs made fast to the steel frame of the bed with a short length of chain.

"Don't try to grab her," he warned me.

She caught my left hand and snapped the cuff over the wrist. Then she came around to the other side of the bed and made my right hand fast with another on that side. I could move my hands, but there wasn't enough slack in the chains to bring them together. He put down the gun, tied my feet together with a piece of rope that had been lying in the chair, and then secured them to the foot of the bed. Forcing my mouth open, he shoved a wadded handkerchief in it and plastered adhesive tape across my face to keep it in. She had gone back to the doorway and was silently watching. There was no expression on her face at all, no pity, no regret, not even any hate. It was just something that had to be done, and they did it. They'd kill me the same way.

No, I thought. She would, perhaps, but he'd make it a personal thing. That business of her having to shack up with me for the past six days was riding him hard, and every time he thought about it it dug him a little more. They'd had to do it that way, and it had meant nothing to her, but he wasn't liking it a bit.

He stepped back, took out a handkerchief, and wiped the sweat from his face. He'd been under a strain too, in spite of the calm way he looked outside.

Suddenly he caught her in his arms. "Joyce—!"

She broke it up after the first wild clinch. "Please, Dan. Not in front of this vermin."

He turned his face and looked at me for an instant, his eyes savage. They went out and closed the door. It was an act out there at the cabin, I thought, but it wasn't quite all an act.

They didn't come back; there was dead silence in the house. They were probably in her bedroom. I thought about it, trying to keep from getting panicky. I was simply being erased. Three years from now some sports writer covering the pro football circuit would say to somebody in a bar that that guy out there this afternoon reminded him a little of Harlan. Wonder what ever happened to him; make mine a Martini on the rocks—.

Sometime just before dawn Tallant came in, unshackled me, and let me go to the john. The gun was covering me every second. They fastened me down again and left. It grew light in the room. I knew he was gone for the day. She'd probably turned in again. I could hear cars out in the street once in awhile, very faintly because with the air-conditioning turned on all the doors and windows were closed.

I lay staring at nothing, trying not to think.

13.

Sometime during the morning, she came in and asked me if I wanted anything to eat. I stared at her, not even bothering to shake my head.

She went out. I lay there thinking. Tallant was really gone on her, and intensely jealous. Maybe I could make him lose his head by giving him the needle, but what good would that do as long as he had the gun? He'd just kill me that much quicker. It was hopeless.

As soon as it was dark he came in. He had another gun with him this time, a handgun that looked like a Luger. He held it and watched with deadly efficiency while she unlocked the handcuffs and untied my feet. I went to the bathroom with him right behind me. There wasn't a flaw in his procedure anywhere. One false move, and I'd have my spine shattered. They fastened me down again.

He stood looking at me. "Nobody's shown up yet," he said.

I stared at him. I still had the gag in my mouth and couldn't have spoken if there'd been anything to say.

"I'm going out to see if anybody's been to the cabin," he said. "Better hope so, pal." They went out and closed the door.

After awhile I began to hear

voices very faintly, coming from the direction of the livingroom. I tried to see what time it was, but my watch had stopped because I hadn't been able to wind it. The sound of voices increased and I could hear laughter now and then, and music. She was giving a party. *Mrs. Julia Cannon entertained a small group of her friends last night at an informal gathering at her lovely home on Cherrywood Drive—* The cold-blooded deadliness of it got to me for a moment and I felt sick. The only thing she'd forgotten was to use me for a cloak room. She should have brought the mink stoles and evening wraps in and thrown them on my face.

It went on for hours, or so it seemed. It must have been after midnight when it began to quiet down. I wondered if he had been at the party. Apparently he had, for when he came back his face was slightly flushed as if he had been drinking. The house had been silent for about an hour then, so I supposed he had left with the other guests and then sneaked back.

She was still dressed in an evening gown and he had on a dark suit. She stood in the doorway behind him as he came in.

"Your friend must have forgotten you," he said. "Nobody's been out there."

I looked at him. He was feeling his drinks, all right, and he was looking for trouble.

He stepped forward and ripped the adhesive off my mouth.

He looked over his shoulder at her. "Maybe this would be a good time to find out where he hid that tape."

I hadn't had any water for 24 hours. My mouth was so dry I couldn't speak even after the handkerchief was gone from it.

"How about it?" he asked roughly.

My jaw felt as if it had been broken when I tried to move it. My voice cracked. "I told you, you simple bastard. I mailed it."

"Funny he hasn't shown up around here, isn't it?"

I didn't care any more what he did. If I had to go through another 24 hours of lying there I'd go crazy. It was better to provoke something now and take my chances than to go out of my mind.

"Well, why worry about him?" I asked. "When he does show up she can always lay him for you. She doesn't mind."

It got to him so fast he didn't even think to swing at me with the gun. He dropped it into his left hand and smashed me on the jaw with the right. It made my head ring, but I thought I heard a finger break.

"Don't be a fool, Dan," she said with exasperation. "Can't you see he's deliberately trying to make you lose your head?"

"Maybe he's in a hurry. Why keep him waiting?"

She shook her head. "It's been only one day."

"Seven altogether."

"I liked the first six," I said. "Fun, wasn't it, honey?"

He looked down at me with the veins beginning to stand out on his temples. He was half drunk, half crazy from thinking about just that.

"Dan, don't lose your head now. This is dangerous."

"You just don't know how to handle her," I said. "When she starts throwing her weight around, get rough with her. She loves it."

He wheeled and lunged at me, his hands reaching for my throat as he fell across the bed. She sprang forward and began tugging at his arm. "Stop it! Dan, stop it!"

He sat up. His face was white and glistening with sweat. "All right, all right," he said, fighting for breath. He swung around and began tearing at the rope holding my legs. "I'll take the precious son of a bitch out where you won't have to see it, if that's what's worrying you. I'll take care of it. Just keep out of my way—."

The rope came free. He hurried around to the left side of the bed, groping in the pocket of his trousers. His hand came out, holding a pair of small keys tied together with twine. I watched him, hardly daring to breathe now. If I didn't get a chance within the next few seconds I'd never have one again. He unlocked the handcuff on the left side and slid the loop of

the chain out of the other half of it. I saw what he was going to do. He'd shackle my hands together with that pair before he broke the other one loose.

She was standing below the foot of the bed, silently watching. Suddenly she gestured impatiently. "Put the gag back in his mouth. You can't take him out of here that way."

"All right!" he said furiously. He grabbed the handkerchief and began wadding it back in my mouth. He stuck the tape back over it. Most of the adhesive was gone from it now and it didn't hold very well. I lay perfectly still, as if I had forgotten as well as he had that my left wrist was free now and that the handcuff was lying beside my hand.

He pushed down hard against my mouth with his hand to fasten the tape. "There, you son of a bitch."

I drew the left arm back a little. My fingers closed over one loop of the handcuffs.

"Dan!" she shrieked. "Look out!"

I swung it as hard as I could. The cuff hit him over the right temple, but even as it landed I knew I hadn't had enough swing on it to knock him out. He jerked and grunted and fell over on top of me. I tried to pull the arm free to swing again, but I could get only the forearm out. He was across my upper arm and shoulder. I put the hand against his throat and strained, trying to pull him to the

right so I could reach him with that one too. His body rolled a little. I could get my right hand on his shirt collar. I locked my fingers on it and pulled, but he was coming around now and beginning to struggle. I let go with the left and shoved it downward, toward his right-hand coat pocket where the gun was.

Then she was on us both. He rolled back a little when she landed, and all his weight was on my left arm. I was still short of the pocket a good six inches when her hand flashed into it and came out with the gun. She tried to back off us. I grabbed for her and caught the upper edge of the strapless gown. A seam ripped. She slashed downward at my arm with the gun, and it went numb up to the shoulder.

She slid back and stood up, still holding the gun. Her hair was disheveled and her eyes wild, and the torn gown was threatening to slide down onto her hips. She looked deadly enough to give you nightmares for the rest of your life. He put a hand on my chest and pushed upward, swinging the other one at my face. I turned, heaving my shoulders, and he lost his balance and fell on me again. I got both hands on his throat once more. There was no strength at all in the left one, but I managed to hold on. He was still weak from the blow on the head and I was cutting off his wind now. In all the wildness I looked at her again

and saw her trying to find the safety on the gun. It was pointed right at my face.

He gave one last effort and jerked free and then the gun went off. He jerked and went limp in my arms and his face dropped onto my chest.

I looked at her, still too numb to move. She was standing very still, staring with horror at the back of his head. The gun slipped from her fingers and thudded gently on the carpet. There was a greenish tinge to the pallor of her face just as she collapsed slowly to her knees and then fell forward, out of sight below the foot of the bed. She had killed him. He was lying across me, I was still handcuffed to the bed, and everybody in this end of town would have heard the shot. And then she had capped everything by fainting.

What had he done with the keys? He'd had them. Were they in the bed, or had he put them back in one of his pockets? Somebody would call the police. If they didn't get any answer when they came they'd break in. I had to get her awake so she could go to the door if they did come, and I couldn't even reach her.

I rolled him off me and sat up. The keys were nowhere in sight on the bed. Where were they? *Where?* Hurry, I thought. For the love of God, find them before they start pounding on the door. I slid off the bed. I couldn't stand erect

because of the shortness of the chain between the handcuff and the bed frame. I couldn't reach the foot of the bed, where she was.

I caught him by a shoulder and pushed. He moved over a little. The keys weren't under him. He was lying on his back now. I plunged the left hand into his right-hand trousers pocket and yanked it wrong side out. There was nothing in it but some change and a pocket knife. I reached across and turned the left one out. There was a folded handkerchief in it. I threw it aside, and then stared. The keys dropped out, falling onto the sheet right at the far edge of the bed. I lunged for them and my fingertips brushed them off onto the floor on the other side.

It was a nightmare now. I reached across as far as I could, and then downward. My extended fingertips touched metal. But the keys were a fraction of an inch out of reach.

Then the telephone began ringing.

14.

The ringing went on and on with that insistent and angry sound an unanswered telephone has. I lunged against the chain like an animal in a steel trap. I couldn't even touch the keys now. I stopped and lay perfectly still in the calm that is beyond frenzy.

Then suddenly the perfectly ob-

vious answer to the whole thing occurred to me. I could reach them with my foot. I shoved my left foot forward and got the toe of the shoe behind them. I dragged them slowly toward me.

The telephone stopped ringing just as I picked them up.

Now whoever it was would call the cops. Maybe somebody already had. I was sweating, and my hands shook. She hadn't stirred. I juggled the keys in my hand. The first one was right. The handcuffs clicked open and I lunged toward her. She lay on her back behind the footboard of the bed, her eyes closed and one arm stretched out beyond her head. Her face was dead white and the long lashes made shadows on her cheek. I fell to the floor beside her and grabbed her bare shoulder, shaking it furiously. She, finally, moved her head a little and her eyes opened.

I put my face down close to hers and whispered furiously, "Listen. Can you hear me?"

There was no response, nothing but a blank stare. She was still in shock.

The telephone began ringing again.

Tires screamed out on the street somewhere as a car slid to a stop.

Her lips move. "Dan—."

The doorbell chimed.

Oh, Jesus—.

I grabbed her by both shoulders. "They're here. The cops. You've got to go to the door or they'll

break in. Somebody reported the shot."

"Dan! I killed him—."

I hauled her up to a sitting position and put my mouth against her ear. "Shut up! You've got to go to that door. Can you stand up?"

She stared at me. "What difference does it make now?"

I fought down a crazy impulse to scream at her. "What difference—? Listen, you little fool—." I broke off, staring at the torn evening gown. She couldn't go to the door in that. She was supposed to have been asleep. "Where is your robe?"

The doorbell chimed again. The telephone went on ringing.

I shook her. "Get out of that dress!"

There must be a robe of some kind in the clothes closet of her bedroom. I sprang up and ran in there. A blue dressing gown was thrown across the back of a chair and some slippers were on the floor beside it. When I got back in the other room she was still sitting in the same place with her hands up against her temples.

I knelt beside her and slapped her across the side of the face. "Get out of that dress! Look! They're going to break in here in about one more minute, and when they do you're going to the chair for murder."

She seemed to understand me at last. She began fumbling with the top of the dress. It would take her an hour the way she was going at

it. I grabbed it, ripped it off, hauled her erect in nothing but her pants and bra and garter belt, and grabbed the robe. Somehow she managed to stand. We got the robe about her shoulders and belted it.

"Lean on me," I snapped. I knelt and yanked off the high-heeled shoes one at a time and slid her feet into the mules.

I shoved her ahead of me toward the door into the hall. "All right," I hissed at her. "You're on your own. Answer the door, and the hell with the telephone. You've been asleep. Something waked you, but you don't know what it was. Make it good, or they've got you."

She swayed once and put out a hand to free herself. Then she was gone down the hall. I eased along after her until I reached the L, and flattened myself against the wall still out of sight of the livingroom.

I could hear them. "Mrs. Cannon?" It was a man's voice.

"Yes," she said. "What is it?"

"Sorry to trouble you. I'm Charlie Lane, from the Sheriff's office. Somebody reported a disturbance of some sort in the neighborhood. Thought it was a gunshot—."

She said just what I'd told her, and she said it correctly, with just the right amount of sleepiness in her voice. She was good.

"You didn't hear a shot, then?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said. "I'm not sure what waked me."

"Probably the telephone," he an-

swered. "Mrs. Ives said she tried to call you before she phoned us. Said the sound seemed to come from over here."

"Probably a car backfiring," she said wearily. It sounded as if she had yawned. What an actress, I thought.

"Could have been," he agreed. "But she insisted it was a gun. Said she was awake, reading, and she never did hear any car. Well, sorry I troubled you, Mrs. Cannon. We'll look around the neighborhood. Don't worry about it."

"Thank you," she said. The door closed. The telephone had already stopped ringing. My knees felt rubbery as I leaned against the wall and wiped sweat from my face.

She was returning. I hurried down the hall and into the room where he was. Scooping up the gun, I put it on safety and shoved it in my pocket. I looked at him and came back out into the hall.

"You'd better come on down to your own bedroom," I said, taking her arm.

She stopped and looked at me. Her face was intensely still and her eyes were cold as ice. "Thank you," she said softly. "Thank you so very much for everything, Mr. Harlan."

She brushed past me and walked as erect as a ramrod into her own room and collapsed slowly across the bed. Her face was in her arms, but there was no sound of crying.

I went back in and stood looking down at him, trying to think.

We'd thrown them off the track for the moment, but what now. I could still save it if we could get him out of here. But how? They were still prowling the neighborhood; a car leaving here now would make them suspicious as hell.

Well, I could walk out and get away. Leave her here and keep going. The hell with her. It was her problem, wasn't it?

No. The hell it was. I was tied to her. If they caught her she'd talk. I was implicated in murder now as well as blackmail. There was something else too. I wasn't going to quit and just throw it away after I was in it this far. I wanted that money, and I was going to get it. There had to be a way. All we had to do was get him out of here—.

Sure. It started to come to me. He'd set the whole thing up himself. Nobody knew I was here, and nobody knew he was here. It was made to order. If her car were to leave here—not tonight, but tomorrow, in a perfectly routine manner—with nobody in it except her, what could possibly be suspicious about that? Hell, it was perfect.

I heard a sound in the bathroom next door. She was beginning to snap out of it. That was fine. I started into the bath to give her the word.

The door was open. She was standing before the medicine cabinet shaking capsules out of a

brown bottle. There were at least a dozen of them in the palm of her left hand and a tumbler of water was standing on the back rim of the basin. I jumped for her. She heard me and whirled. I caught her wrist, forced her hand open, and dropped the capsules into the john. Taking the bottle from her other hand, I shook the remaining ones out, threw them into the can, and flushed it.

"Look, you little fool!" I hissed at her. "Have you gone crazy? There's nothing to it. All we have to do is get him out of here. I know a way to do it—."

She held herself erect with both hands on the wash basin. Her face was like chalk, and she spoke as if all the breath had been squeezed out of her. "Aren't you ever going to be through with me and leave me alone? Couldn't you even let me die with a little dignity?"

"Die, hell. Who wants to die?"

"I've had these for months. I've been saving them, because I knew there was a good chance I'd have to use them some day."

"Shut up!"

"I won't be taken alive. I have no intention of becoming the feature attraction at a Roman carnival—."

I caught her shoulders. "Listen!" I whispered furiously. "They won't catch you. Use your head, you little idiot. Nobody knows he's even been here. All we have to do is get him out, and you'll never be suspected."

She stared with hopeless bitter-

ness. "What difference does it make now?"

"What the hell's the matter with you?"

"Don't you see?" she said slowly. "You never win in the end. You can't. You merely postpone defeat."

"You won't even make an effort to save yourself?"

"What good would it do?"

I wanted to swing at her. I was beginning to feel crazy. Catching her by both shoulders again, I put my face right down in hers and snarled at her. "Tough? Why, you runny-nosed little crybaby, you haven't got the guts of a louse. I doubt if you'd have had the guts to swallow those pills. You're a punk. Why don't you face it?"

Anger was beginning to show in her eyes now. That was what I wanted to see.

"And just what do you want?" she asked coldly.

"The same thing I've been after all the time. I can save your neck, but you haven't got the brains to see it. Look. You can't bring Talant back, but at least you can keep from having your name smeared all over every paper in the country and winding up in the chair for killing him. How do you want it?"

"What makes you think you can do it?"

"I'll show you if you'll stop acting like a crippled chicken."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Nothing, right now. Just give me your car keys and go lie down."

Her eyes widened. "You're not going to try to—to—?"

"Not tonight. Of course not. If they saw your car leaving here now they might stop it. Even if the police didn't see it, one of the old busybodies around here'd notice. Just get out of my way, and I'll tell you everything to do before I shove off."

She gave me the car keys out of her purse and lay down on the bed. I went back and looked at him. The top of his head was a mess, but he hadn't bled too much. The bullet had entered just at the base of his skull and come out on top. That was bad; I had to find it. It took me about five minutes. All that was necessary was to stand about where she had been and line it up. It had gone into a pillow my own head had been on, not more than three inches from my face, and was still inside. I could feel it with my fingers. There'd be a lot of bloodstained feathers inside; it wouldn't do to leave it around here even if I got the bullet out. I took it out through the kitchen, opened the trunk of the car, and put it inside. That was the beauty of the whole thing. It wasn't necessary to go outside at all. I went back.

The other pillow was all right. There was no blood on it. The sheet was badly bloodstained, and the top of the mattress pad, but the mattress itself was all right. I rolled the sheet and pad around him

and then wrapped a folded blanket around the upper part of his body and tied him up with the rope he'd had around my legs. This was the hard part now.

He was heavy. I was puffing and wet with sweat by the time I dragged and carried him as far as the garage. I had to rest before I could boost him up into the trunk. When I had him folded into it I went back to her bedroom.

"What'd you do with my suitcase?" I asked.

"It's in the closet there," she replied without looking up.

"What about the money? I guess you took that out?"

"No. It's still in there."

"Good," I said. I had bloodstains on the sports shirt I was wearing. I brought the suitcase out and changed into a new one. Cutting the laundry-mark out of the old one, I flushed it down the john, and rolled the shirt itself in a newspaper. I put it into the car trunk also. I was getting a little sick of him now and was glad it was about over. It was a messy business. I took the two handcuffs and the chains off the bed and threw them in, and that was it.

I went back. "All right," I told her. "Everything's set except for remaking that bed. You can do that."

She got up without saying anything, took some fresh sheets out of a closet, and made the bed. She put the spread over it. I looked around. The cops could paw through here a

week and never find anything to indicate I'd ever been here or Talant either. We went back in her bedroom. I looked at her watch on the dresser and wound and reset my own. It was 4:15.

"Sit down," I said.

She sat down on the bed, staring at me without any expression at all. I tossed her the keys and lit a cigarette.

"You've got it made," I said. "It's a cinch from here on. Here's what you do, and be sure you get it all straight. Call any one of the local biddies on some excuse in the morning and just mention you're going to Galveston to visit friends over the weekend. Back the car out of the garage and leave it at the curb while you come back and get your suitcase. Throw it in back. Stop at some service station where you're known—or even at Cannon Motors—and have the car gassed up. Everything perfectly natural and aboveboard, see? You might even let them sweep out the car, but for Christ's sake if they start checking the tires be sure you don't let go your keys. If anybody ever opens that trunk, you're dead.

"Drive on out that road to Breward. Time it so you get to that road turning off to the lake at about a quarter of ten. I'll be waiting for you in the trees just off the road, and I'll have that tape with me—"

She interrupted me. Her eyes were very cold. "So you did have it all the time?"

"Of course. But that's a dead issue now. I don't even have to give it to you, but I might as well. I don't want it. Anyway, get to that turnoff about a quarter of ten, the way I told you. If there are any other cars in sight, just pull off and pretend to be looking at a road map. I don't want anybody to see me. When it's clear, I'll hop in.

"This is Friday, and I'm not sure the banks down there are open tomorrow, but we can make it in three hours. I'll drop you off at the Carson Hotel. You get a room, and then take a taxi to the bank. Draw out \$92,000 in cash. Have you got a briefcase?"

She nodded.

"All right. Bring it." I looked at my watch again and stood up. "But never mind now. I'd better get going. I can tell you the rest of it after you pick me up."

"What about—?"

"I'll take care of him. All you do is drive the car from here to the turnoff, and from then on the whole thing is my baby. You're paying me; I'll do it."

"All right," she said.

"You're convinced now it can be done, and that it's easy?" I asked. "No more of this flipping your lid and trying to kill yourself?"

"I'm all right now," she said coldly. "I'll meet you."

I let myself out into the patio through the door behind the drape. In another ten minutes I was on the Breward road going out of

town. Just at sunrise I was digging up the tape where I had buried it under the old stump. I slipped it in a pocket and sat down to rest while I smoked a cigarette. There was plenty of time. It was still a few minutes of nine when I got back out to the Breward road again. I sat down out of sight in the timber and waited. I was tired and hungry and almost numb now from this rat-race that seemed to have been going on forever, but excitement was strong inside me. In just a few more hours it would all be over and I'd have it made for good. They'd almost beaten me, but I had whipped them in the end.

By nine-thirty I was beginning to stare anxiously down the road, starting to worry again.

But right on the button of 9:45 she came by and picked me up. Everything was going beautifully.

15.

I pushed it hard, but took no chances, remembering the cargo we had in the trunk and what would happen if we had a wreck. It was a little before one when we came into downtown Houston.

"I'll drop you at the hotel," I said. "Register, and then grab a cab for the bank. Draw out the money, come back to the hotel, and wait for me to call. It'll be sometime after midnight when I get back, and when I do the car'll be empty and you won't have anything to

worry about. I'll turn the tape over to you at the same time, and you've got it made."

"Simple, isn't it?" she said coldly.

"Like shooting fish," I said.

I pulled up in front of the hotel loading zone. Some uniformed types helped her out and took her luggage. I wheeled it on out and caught the Galveston highway. When I got down there I bought a shovel at a hardware store and put it in the car. There were several hours to kill. When it was dark I started out west beach. I drove for miles, until I was all alone along a vast stretch of empty dunes and scrub salt cedars. Parking the car well off the road, I went back in the edge of the cedars, found a sandy spot, and started to dig. It took over an hour to scoop out a place big enough and a little over four feet deep. A few cars went past, down near the edge of the water, but they could see only the car.

When I was finished I lit a cigarette and waited until there were no headlights in sight anywhere before I opened the trunk and dragged him out. I dropped him in the hole, threw in the pillow, the bloodstained clothes, and the handcuffs, and began pushing the sand back in with the shovel. When it was pretty well smoothed off I threw loose sand across the whole area with a swinging motion of the shovel, and turned on the headlights for an instant to see how it

looked. It was fine. It might be a year before anybody even happened to stop at this particular spot. Nobody would ever see Tallant again.

I drove back toward town. After two or three miles I stopped and threw the shovel back among some cedars. It was 12:30 AM when I got back in Houston. I parked the car on the street near the Carson, took my bag out, and caught a cab. Checking in at a small hotel six or eight blocks away, I went up and bathed, shaved, and changed clothes.

I called the Carson. When the girl at the switchboard answered, I said, "Mrs. Joyce Cannon, please."

"One moment, please."

I could hear her ringing the room. It went on. There was no answer.

"I'm very sorry, sir. Her room doesn't answer."

"Will you try again? This is very important."

"Yes, sir. Oh, I'm sorry. I believe now she called in and left a message a few minutes ago. Who is calling, please?"

"Mr. Harlan."

"Yes, that's right. She said if you called, would you leave your number?"

I gave her the hotel number and the room extension and hung up. I didn't understand it. Why would she be wandering around town alone at one in the morning? Had something gone wrong? Hell, how could it? It was just a simple matter of cashing a check. I stared at

the telephone, trying to force it to ring. That got too nerve-wracking after awhile. I got up and unpacked the rest of the gear in my bag, and checked the envelope containing the eight thousand. Just for something to do, I counted it again. It was all there, to the last five dollar bill.

The telephone rang. I grabbed it.

"Mr. Harlan?" It was her voice, all right. I could hear music in the background. Hell, hadn't she gone back to the hotel yet?

"Yes," I said. "Where are you? Have you got it?"

"I'm in a bar on Fannin," she replied.

"Have you got it?"

"Of course," she replied coolly. "It's right here in the booth with me."

"All right. Good. Do you want me to meet you at the Carson?"

"No. I'll come there. What's the name of the hotel?"

"Magill," I said. "For God's sake, hurry it up. You're sober, aren't you?"

"Of course." She hung up.

They never made sense, I thought. Wandering around in bars at one in the morning with \$92,000 in cash. I got up and began pacing up and down the room. I'd have gone crazy trying to sit still. I thought of all I had gone through for that money.

There was a light tap on the door. I sprang forward to open it.

She was very smooth looking in a light skirt and straw-colored

blouse with a bunch of violets pinned to one shoulder. She was carrying the briefcase and her purse, and she had a folded newspaper under one arm.

"Come in," I said. "Come in."

I closed the door and started to grab for the briefcase. She tossed it carelessly on the bed and sat down in the armchair near the desk and telephone stand. I forgot her. I sat down on the bed and sliced open the zipper of the briefcase. My hands shook a little. Oh, Jesus, it was wonderful. It was in bundles tied with paper bands with the denomination stamped on them. I let them fall out on the bed. They fell in little stacks.

"Quite an interesting sight," she said.

I turned. The brown eyes were on my face with a cool and faintly mocking expression in them.

"You're satisfied now?" she asked.

"Sure, sure," I said.

Then, without looking at me, she asked, "I won't ask any of the details, but—it was on Galveston Island?"

"Yes," I said. "Does it matter?"

She shook her head slowly. "I guess not."

"The tape's there on the dresser," I said.

"Thank you." She looked toward it without much interest, and made no move to pick it up.

"Don't you want it?"

"Not particularly."

I stared at her. "I don't get you."

"It isn't important, is it? I mean, it has no actual value except as a hockey puck or a ball has value as long as a game of some kind is in progress. The game is over, so it is no longer something to be pursued. And, obviously, you could have made twenty copies of it by this time."

"You're an odd-ball," I said. "Which reminds me, why were you wandering around in bars with all that money on you? I thought you'd be at the hotel."

"Oh. I haven't been back to the hotel since the morning papers hit the streets."

I stared at her, puzzled. "Why not?"

The paper she had brought was lying folded in her lap. She tossed it to me. "Perhaps that will clear it up for you."

I unfolded it. In the center of the front page a two-column picture of Joyce Cannon hit me right in the eye. SOUGHT, the caption read.

I stared, feeling cold in the center of my back. There were two columns of the story. Headlines and sub-heads sprang up at me. WIDOW SOUGHT IN "PERFECT-CRIME" SLAYING . . . REPORTED IN HOUSTON . . . TIE-UP WITH PURVIS SLAYING HINTED . . . NEW MYSTERY ADDED . . .

"A story of five months' dogged but unpublicized police work was

revealed today in the announcement by the Lucerne County Sheriff's office that it is believed to be almost certain now that Howard L. Cannon, Wayles automobile dealer, was murdered last April instead of meeting death in an automobile crash as was supposed. The dead man's widow, Mrs. Joyce Cannon, is being sought for questioning in connection with the crime, as is Daniel R. Tallant, Wayles sporting goods dealer. Both are missing. It is further suspected that Tallant himself may have met with foul play.

"Both new light and fresh mystery were added to the case in the past 24 hours with the announcement that Tallant is wanted for questioning in connection with the death of Wilton L. Purvis, former insurance investigator of Houston who figured prominently in the investigation of the supposedly accidental death of Cannon last April, and by the announcement that Tallant has disappeared following a mysterious gunshot heard in the vicinity of the Cannon home last night and that his car was later found parked near a wooded area some two blocks away.

"Following a search of the Cannon home by police yesterday, it was announced that definite traces of blood were found on the floor of the garage—."

That was where I had put him down.

"—and that an empty cartridge

case was found in one of the bedrooms of the house—."

Oh, Jesus, I hadn't even thought of that.

She was saying something.

"Shut up!" I said. I felt as if my head would fly off. "I've got to see what it says—."

She shook her head. "It's not really necessary. I can tell you what it says. They have been working on it for five months, and since Purvis's death they have been working with the Houston police. A picture of Dan has been identified by three people as the man they saw in the vicinity of Purvis's apartment house that night.

"They know I'm in Houston. The bank has reported I cashed that check for \$92,000 this afternoon. They think I'm trying to escape, using the money, and every exit has been blocked off. I shall be picked up in a matter of hours, if not minutes. If I had stayed in the hotel I would be in custody now. And if you left the car anywhere near the hotel it is probably being examined for evidence at this moment—."

"Shut up!" I fought to keep my voice down. I wanted to scream at her. "Let me read—."

She shook her head. "You are so obvious. There is no mention of you anywhere in the story. Apparently nobody has any idea you have been connected with it at all."

I sighed weakly. I was all right. I was free. They couldn't do any-

thing to me because they didn't even know about me. Nobody did. Except—

She smiled. "Nobody except me, Mr. Harlan."

I stared at her.

She shook her head. "You can't kill me. You are registered in this room, under your own name. And you might have some difficulty in getting my body out of here."

"Wh—what are you going to do? Why did you come here?"

She took a puff on the cigarette and slowly tapped the ash into a tray. "I'm not going to do anything. In another half hour I shall be dead. I told you I have no taste for Roman carnival."

"Where—?"

"Not here. Obviously, that would be in very bad taste because it would embarrass you. I shall check in at some other hotel, under another name. By the time my description registers, I shall be beyond their reach. Naturally, I had the prescription refilled before I left town yesterday."

I leaned forward. "Look. You mean you're going to walk out of here, and say nothing to anybody? And you'll be dead when they find you?"

"Precisely."

"I don't get it. What did you come here for?"

"Why, to say goodbye. And to give you that money."

I stared at her. "Why? I—I mean, the money?"

Her eyebrows raised. "I promised it to you, didn't I? And what else could I do with it? I had already cashed the check before I learned I was trapped with no further place to run. I have no one to leave it to, even if I had a safe place to leave it."

I shook my head. It was unbelievable. But there it was. I had the money, and as soon as she walked out of this hotel I was free to run and nobody would even be looking for me.

"Thanks," I said. "Thanks a million."

"You are entirely welcome."

I looked at my watch. I could probably catch one of the early flights to the Coast. "Well, I won't keep you. And hadn't you better shove right along? You wouldn't want to stooge around too long and let them pick you up."

She smiled. "And certainly not in your room? I was wondering if you would actually say that."

"So I've said it."

"The so beautifully consistent Mr. Harlan." She gathered up her purse. "But there was one other thing."

"What's that?"

"The goodbye," she said quietly.

"All right. So goodbye."

She studied me thoughtfully. "The goodbye carries a legacy with it. I wanted to leave you something."

Without thinking, I glanced around at the money on the bed.

She shook her head. "Not that. That's yours, free and clear, to enjoy as you wish. You might even say you earned it; at least you worked hard enough for it. No. The legacy is something else entirely. What I am going to bequeath to you is an emotion."

I wondered if she'd blown her stack completely.

"You lead a very barren life, insulated as you are against everything. I have just done what I could to rectify that, by arranging for you to have one with you rather consistently in the future, the only emotion—besides greed—that I believe you are capable of feeling. Fear."

"What in hell are you talking about?"

"Your predilection for the letter-to-be-opened-after my death sort of threat intrigued me. So I thought you'd appreciate this thing I've arranged for you. I have a friend here in town who is a very old woman in very ill health. She used to be one of my teachers years ago. I am quite fond of her, and I am glad to be able to say that for some perverse reason she likes me. Like a great many very old women she has grown to be unimpressed by a number of things and she has a somewhat irreverent sense of humor. She also happens to have a Notary's commission.

"I spent about two hours out at her home this evening, after the morning papers came out. I wrote

out a rather full account of all this thing, particularly in reference to your participation in it, and signed it in her presence. She put her seal on it. That is, she doesn't know what is in the document, but she witnessed the signature. It has been sealed, and will be placed in her lawyer's safe, to be opened when she dies. That may be next month, next year, or three years from now—."

I stared at her. I couldn't even open my mouth to speak.

"There is no statute of limitations on murder, Mr. Harlan," she went on. "You are guilty of withholding evidence of two murders, and of being not only an accessory but an active participant in a third."

I finally got my mouth open. Nothing came out.

She turned and started toward the door. Then she paused with her hand on the knob.

"Of course, I could have merely had it notarized and then left it beside me tonight so the police would find it in the morning, but that seemed to me to lack finesse. That way, you wouldn't have time to enjoy your wealth, or to savor your emotion to its fullest."

I grabbed her arm. "You can't do it! No—."

She smiled and opened the door. Gently disengaging her arm, she said, "Good night, Mr. Harlan. And think of me from time to time, will you?"

She lifted her hand in a little ges-

ture of farewell and went down the hall. I leaned weakly against the door and watched her. It was an erect and unhurried walk, as if she didn't have a care in the world.

I went back inside and closed the door. A month . . . a year . . . three years . . . I sat down on the bed. It was lumpy and uncomfortable. I looked around and saw I was sitting on the pile of money. I pushed it off onto the floor. I'd never know. The first inkling I'd ever have of it was when they came knocking on the door to pick me up. Run? Run where? They always found you.

I lunged to my feet. It was here. Here in this city. Look. All I had to do was find her so I could get it away from her and destroy it. Hell, finding her would be easy. She was a Notary Public. She was an old woman. She was ill. How many old-women-ill-Notaries-Public were there in a city of maybe less than a million?

I grabbed up the telephone directory and flipped wildly through the yellow pages.

Column after column of Notaries Public.

And so what was I going to find her for? To kill her? If she wouldn't tell me where the state-

ment was, I'd have to threaten to kill her to make her talk, and if I killed her they would get me just that much quicker—.

And she didn't have it, anyway. Her attorney had it.

So I had to find her, and then find out who her attorney was. And if she wouldn't tell me who her attorney was, I had to threaten to kill her to make her talk, and if I killed her—.

How many attorneys were there in a city of maybe less than a million? The yellow pages flew by in a blur.

Attorneys. (See Lawyers.)

Lapidaries . . . Lawn Mowers . . . Lawn Mowers, Rental . . .

Lawyers.

I stared. Page after page of lawyers.

I sat down again. It was all right. It's just a problem, see? Find her, find the attorney—lawyer, that is—get somebody to open the safe. She'll live that long. Sure she will.

Suddenly, I thought of Tallant. He was dead. And by now she was probably dead too. The roulette wheel had stopped for them and they were at peace.

And why shouldn't they? They had got up and given me their seats in front of the wheel.



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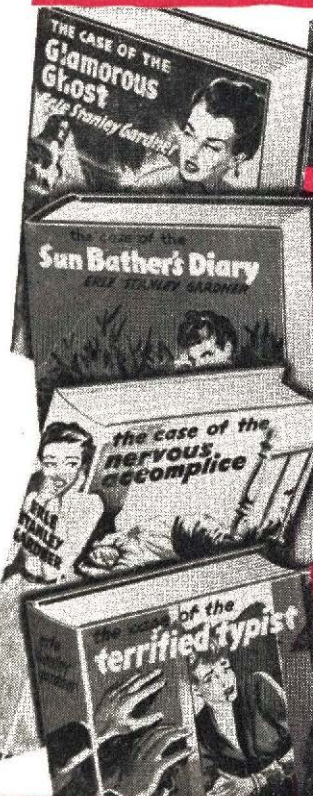
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3 The Case of The SUN BATHER'S DIARY

Perry gets a frantic phone call—from a woman who says all her clothes and her auto trailer were stolen while she was sunbathing. She offers Perry \$1500 to recover them. The investigation leads Mason into a **MURDER** case. According to the evidence, the killer is either Perry's client... or Perry himself!

4 The Case of The GLAMOROUS GHOST

Perry's client has amnesia. She can't remember a thing that happened on the fateful night her husband was murdered. She can't even recognize her own gun—the **MURDER WEAPON!**

5 The Case of The RESTLESS REDHEAD

Perry Mason's client is the victim of a double frame-up... or is she? The first time she called up Steve Merrill, the police came—and accused her of stealing \$40,000 in jewels from Merrill's wife. The **SECOND** time she called him, the police came again. This time they accused her of **MURDERING** Merrill!

6 The Case of The RUNAWAY CORPSE

Myrna Davenport hires Mason to get a letter which accuses her of plotting to poison her husband Ed. (Ed has just died of arsenic poisoning!) Perry searches Ed's office and finds an envelope with six sheets of blank paper! Then the police accuse Perry of substituting the blanks for the **REAL** letter!

—Continued on inside cover

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