

KEYHOLE MYSTERY

Magazine

CONTENTS

THE TRAP <i>by Norman Daniels</i>	6
NIGHT RIDE <i>by Theodore Sturgeon</i>	16
CONCEALED PATH <i>by Melville Davisson Post</i>	28
THE DIAMONDS <i>by Frank Atterholt</i>	39
A CASE OF HOMICIDE <i>by Rog Phillips</i>	45
THE DEADLIEST GAME <i>by Joseph Whitehill</i>	55
WIFE KILLER <i>by Rod Reed</i>	68
A MATTER OF LIFE <i>by Robert Bloch</i>	84
BORN FOR MURDER <i>by John Collier</i>	90
REST IN PEACE <i>by Avram Davidson</i>	105
A CHRISTIAN BURIAL <i>by Mary Thayer Muller</i>	110
A KISS FOR BELINDA <i>by Laurence G. Blochman</i>	115
AUTHOR'S CHOICE:	
I.O.U. <i>by Cornell Woolrich</i>	70

PUBLISHER: William Woolfolk

EDITOR: Dan Roberts

KEYHOLE MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Vol. 1, No. 2, published bi-monthly by WINSTON PUBLICATIONS, Inc., 157 West 57th St. N. Y. 19, N. Y. Subscriptions 1 year (6 issues) \$2.00. 2 years (12 issues) \$4.00. Single copy 35c. Application for second class entry pending at the post office at New York, N. Y., and Holyoke, Mass. Characters in this magazine are entirely fictitious and have no relation to any persons living or dead. Copyright 1960 by Winston Publications, Inc. Printed in U. S. A.

*The salesman had a most unusual product to offer—
and, for obvious reasons, only one to a customer ...*

A MATTER OF LIFE

by ROBERT BLOCH

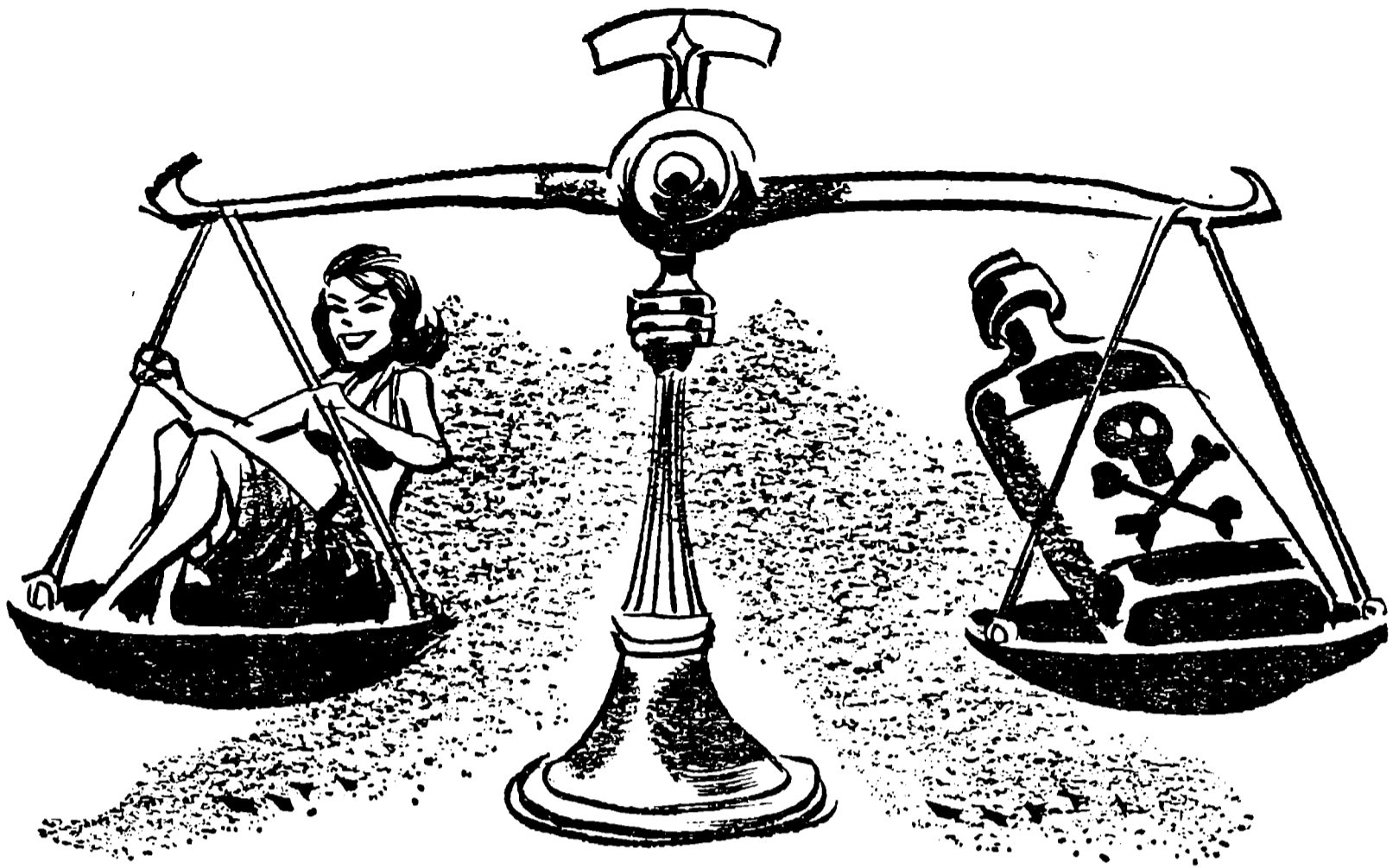
IT WAS A BRIGHT AND SUNNY morning, but the thin man hugged the inside of the walk, staying within the shadows as he made his way carefully along the street.

He paused beneath the ornate awning of a Gold Coast apartment and put his small black bag on the sidewalk, setting it down gingerly as though its contents might be fragile. He drew a little leatherbound notebook from his pocket and opened it to the first page, peering carefully at what he saw there. Satisfied, he flipped it shut, replaced it in his pocket, picked up the black bag, and entered the fancy foyer of the

apartment building. His long, bony finger pressed a buzzer beside a marker lettered *Anderson, Julius T.*

Exactly seventy-two seconds later he was standing before a door on the third floor, watching it ease open.

A woman thrust her head out. It was a most expensive sort of head; quickly he inventoried its assets—the thirty-five dollar permanent, the twenty-dollar dye job, the five-dollar tip to the beauty-parlor operator. In addition, he estimated the worth of the dangling miniature mobile earrings at perhaps another twenty-five dollars, plus ten percent



tax. The face itself was decorated with easily five dollars' worth of assorted eyebrow pencil, eye-shadow, mascara, rouge, powder, lipstick, and dabs of perfume. Also, the sagging double chin had been lifted for a considerable fee; contact lenses were fitted to the myopic eyes and caps placed over the irregular teeth. The whole head, give or take a few pennies, must have cost at least two thousand dollars just for upkeep and maintenance.

And yet now, seeing it cocked forward apprehensively with a deep frown furrowing the brow, one could only conclude that the money had been wasted; it was

still the head of a middle-aged woman.

"Mrs. Anderson?" the man murmured.

"Yes." She glanced down at the little black bag, then straightened. "Come in, please."

The door opened wider, permitting him to step inside, then closed quickly behind him. He stood in a spacious, deeply-carpeted alcove, gazing through to the living-room of the apartment. There was no need to inventory its contents or even guess at the fee of the interior decorator who had obviously ordered its furnishing.

Also, there was no time. The

woman faced him, the maroon sateen sleeves of her lounging pajamas rustling faintly as she moved a step forward.

"I really wasn't expecting you, Mr. —"

"Mr. Swift."

"Yes." She acknowledged the name with an impatient nod and hurried on. "That stupid Mr. Ross of yours, down at the office, kept telling me it was no use to even discuss the possibilities of a case, because I had no grounds. Of course, that's utterly ridiculous, and I told him so. Even if Julius *is* good about money and doesn't chase after other women, surely there must be *something*! I mean, no man his age is a saint, and I'm perfectly willing to pay a good fee, within reason of course, if you'll arrange to—"

"Please, Mrs. Anderson," said the man. "There seems to be a slight misunderstanding here. I'm not from your attorney's office."

"You're not?" The surgically-lifted chin muscles sagged slightly. "Then if it isn't about the divorce, what are you doing here? I mean, when I saw the briefcase, I just naturally assumed—"

"Sorry." The man shrugged. "It's not even a briefcase. It's just a bag. I've something interesting to show you."

"You mean you're a *salesman*? What's the matter with you, can't you *read*? The sign in the lobby says distinctly—"

"I saw the sign."

"Then what are you doing here? I don't want to buy anything." Mrs. Anderson waved her arm. "Please leave. I'm not in the mood for sales-talks."

"So I see." The man retreated a step, but only to set his bag down upon the rich pile of the foyer carpet. "From your remarks, one would gather that you're faced with personal problems. And it occurs to me that perhaps my visit is more opportune than you might think. A little distraction, even a sales-talk, may prove helpful." Slowly, he dropped to his knees and cautiously unzipped the black bag.

Mrs. Anderson stared at him curiously. "What are you selling?" she asked.

"This." A bony hand fumbled in the bag and brought forth a small plastic bottle.

"What is it, perfume?"

"Not at all, dear lady. It's a window-wiper."

"Window-cleaner?"

"Wiper." The man stood up, dangling the bottle between long, thin fingers. "Not an ordinary cleaning compound at all. It wipes away much more than dirt—it literally removes every obstruction, and will give you an entirely new view of the world. Oh, there's a definite psychological element involved, I assure you! Once you use this cleansing compound, your whole viewpoint

changes. I would be only too happy to demonstrate—”

“No!” Mrs. Anderson spoke quickly and emphatically. “I don’t *need* anything like that. My maid takes care of the windows. Besides, who ever heard of such nonsense? Why, there isn’t even any label on your bottle, it’s probably just something you make up yourself, out of water and a few chemicals.”

The man nodded slowly. “You’re right, of course,” he said. “I do make it myself. And of course I use chemicals. Funny your mentioning that. Some of the chemicals are quite unusual. Odorless, colorless, undetectable. Strong enough so that a drop applied to a window will wipe away any stain without leaving a trace of its presence. Strong enough so that a drop placed in a cup of coffee will wipe away life itself—again, without leaving a single trace of its presence. One must therefore be most careful about using this solution. You would be careful, wouldn’t you?”

Mrs. Anderson nodded at him now—at him, but to herself. “It really works, you say?”

“I assure you that used properly it will brighten your entire outlook on life.”

“How much?”

The man shrugged. “Let’s call this a free sample.” He held out the bottle.

Mrs. Anderson reached for it,

then drew back. “But suppose it—it doesn’t work?”

“It will. There’s never any difficulty. Take it.”

“Maybe I should think it over.”

“Dear lady, I’m afraid this is your only opportunity. I won’t be coming this way again for some time.”

Mrs. Anderson’s fingers worked. “You wouldn’t be back, then? I mean, in case of trouble—”

“No. I make only one call to a customer.”

Mrs. Anderson closed her eyes for a moment and took a deep breath as she reached out her hand. The man placed the bottle in her palm, scooped up his bag, opened the door and made his exit—all in the few seconds that her eyes were closed. When she opened them again, he was gone.

And an hour later he was ringing the doorbell of the neat suburban ranch-house out in Skokie, staring out of the shadows at the harassed face of the young housewife who greeted him with an impatient gesture. The hand which waved him inside held a dust-cloth. She blinked at him through thick glasses.

“Honestly,” she sighed, “I thought you’d never get here! What with the kids and the housework and all and having to run back and forth between here and the hospital every day, I’m just about out of my mind.”

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Baker," he said. "I came as quickly as I heard."

He glanced around the disorder of the front room, staring at the litter of toys, the playpen in the corner, the soggy diapers tossed into one corner.

The young woman brushed her hand across the damp curls plastered across her forehead and removed her spectacles with a weary shrug.

"You see how it is," she said. "The place is such a mess I don't even know where to tell you to sit down."

"That's all right, Mrs. Baker. I'll just be a minute."

"A minute? With all we've got to discuss?" She put the glasses back on. "I told the man at the agency what a spot we're in, and he said there just wouldn't be any way of working something out. Can you imagine that? Ben in the hospital with a broken spine, paralyzed for life, and me stuck here with the three kids and he tells me that! Not a penny of accident insurance, either. If he died, I'd collect fifty thousand dollars of life insurance from your firm, but when it comes to an accident like this, they say there isn't one red cent I can collect. And he'll never be up and working at sales again, the hospital is eating up our last penny, they can't even promise to stop the pain, and what am I going to do?"

"I really don't know, Mrs. Baker," the man said. "You see, I'm not from the insurance agency."

"Then where did you get my name?"

"There are sources for such information."

"Oh." She blinked at him through her spectacles. "But who are you? What do you want?"

"My name is Mr. Quick. I've come to give you a free sample, something to help you." He put down his bag delicately in the center of the cheap inlaid carpeting. "I have here a preparation which works wonders on window-glass—or on spectacles, too, for that matter. One drop, properly applied, and you'll really be looking at the world through rose-colored glasses—"

Two hours later the man was back across town, walking through a tangle of tenements on South Halstead. He hadn't stopped for lunch.

He paused in a dim areaway and consulted his notebook, then nodded to himself and plunged into a dank and darkened doorway. Four flights of stairs creaked beneath his feet before he reached the landing he sought and knocked briskly on a door from which all paint had peeled.

"Mrs. Connors?" he called.

"Go away!" The voice from behind the door was muffled, sullenly monotonous.

The man knocked again.

"Go away!" the sullen voice repeated. "The Mister ain't here."

"I came to see you. Open up, please."

"You from the police? I tell ya, he ain't here." But she opened the door and shook her frowsy head, squinting at him through red-rimmed eyes framed by larger bluish-black circles. "Coupla beauties, ain't they?" she muttered. "The dirty rat give 'em to me. That's all I ever get from him. You can't prove by me that he pulls any of them big bank jobs you cops always think he's pulling . . . I wish you guys *could* pin a real rap on him, something that'll send him up for twenty years, maybe? Hell, I'd like to see him get life, that's what he deserves. And that's the only way I'll ever get rid of him."

He edged through the door and into the squalid room. "Perhaps I'd better explain, Mrs. Connors. I'm not from the police department."

"No? Then who the hell—"

"The name is Fast. And I've got something here that might interest you." He glanced at the six-pack and the big dime-store goblet on the kitchen table, then put his black bag down beside them with fastidious care. "You see, it's a little something that cleans beer-glasses. And that's not all. If there's *anything* you want to get rid of—"

Early afternoon along LaSalle Street, and the shadows slanted sharply as the man entered the brokerage office. He took off his hat politely before he bent over to give his message to the receptionist. Her own smile faded as she heard what he had to say; then she rose and disappeared into another room. In a few moments she was back, beckoning for him to enter the private, panelled sanctum beyond the big mahogany door.

A fat, baldheaded man looked up from behind a kidney-shaped desk.

"Yes?" he snapped. "Now what's all this nonsense my girl tells me? Something about a matter of life and death—"

"Exactly." The man smiled and began to open his little black bag. "A matter of life and death. I have here a preparation for which you will pay me ten thousand dollars in cash. It is something which I assure you is absolutely essential to your welfare."

"Look here, I'm a busy man—"

"I know that, and I won't take much of your time. I'm sure only a few words of explanation will be necessary. As it so happens, I still have two other similar calls to make after I leave you this afternoon. Now, about this little preparation of mine. It's the *only* antidote to an undetectable poison, Mr. Anderson . . ."

■ ■