

GUILTY

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DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER

BEATNIK WIFE

by DAN MALCOLM

**WALK
AWAY
FROM
DEATH**

by
HARRISON
SMITH

**DEADLY
CALL GIRL**

by RAY McKENSIE

ALL NEW STORIES



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W. W. Scott — Editor

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DEADLY CALL GIRL

by RAY McKENSIE

Anita was an expensive girl,
she could cost a man's life



JACK Donovan said, "I don't know if this sort of thing interests you or not, Fred. But I got the number of the sweetest little tootsie you could imagine, last week. She's expensive, but worth every penny. If you go in for that sort of thing."

Seated across the table from Donovan at the expensive restaurant, Fred Markell toyed with his highball glass and said, in a voice that tried to be casual, "What's she like, Jack?"

Donovan shrugged. "Blonde. Tall. Twenty-one, twenty-two. She hasn't been in the business long, no more than six or eight months. She was married for a while when she was around eighteen, but she went into the call-girl business after the marriage split up."

Markell nodded, trying to hide the inner stab of desire from his lunch companion. "Stacked?"

"I'll say! But she isn't a cow, mind you. She's bosomy without being sloppy. Big and firm, even when she's stripped. And everything else in proportion. This girl is strictly calendar-girl stuff."

"What about the bedroom department?"

"She's a pro, isn't she?"

Markell nodded again and took a quick drink. He felt himself bursting out into a cold sweat. He had always envied Jack Donovan's freedom to make his way from one bedroom to the next. Donovan had never let marriage tie him down, the way Markell had.

Markell said cautiously, "What's the rate?"

"Say, you really *are* interested, aren't you!"

Markell's voice was tight and thin. "Sure I'm interested, Jack. Don't I have a right to be?"

"I thought you were a good faithful husband."

"Most of the time," Markell said. "But it isn't worth it. It just isn't worth it. Janet and I have been miles away from each other psychologically for a good two years now. If I had one more drink in me, I'd tell

you about our sex life. Hell, I'll tell you anyway. It's been lousy lately."

"That so?" Donovan said sympathetically.

Markell leaned forward across the table and stared at the oval, pudgy face of the man opposite him. In a low, conspiratorial whisper he said, "I tell you confidentially, Jack, we aren't getting along at all. Not at all. Something's happening to Janet. She's turning frigid. I don't know what it is. But it's driving me crazy, Jack. Absolutely crazy."

"Maybe she's worried about getting old," Donovan suggested. "That sometimes fouls up a woman's nerves."

Markell laughed. "Old? Hell, she's thirty-three. *Thirty-three*, Jack! She hardly has a wrinkle. She's still got her figure. If she's old, what am I? What are you? We're forty; for Pete's sake! No, it isn't that. It's—I don't know. Some kind of neurosis. All I know is she hardly seems to like sex any more."

"So you're in the market for a call girl?"

Markell nodded. "Yes," he said. "I figure it's simpler that way than starting a love affair."

Love affairs lead to complications. Call girls don't."

THEY had another drink apiece. Markell was starting to feel relaxed, now that he had managed finally to confess to a sympathetic friend what had been bothering him for so many months. He had always been devoted to Janet, had not, like so many businessmen in his income bracket, gone on from one extramarital affair to the next. But he couldn't go on any longer. He was a virile man, he had certain healthy desires that his wife was failing to satisfy.

He had to look elsewhere.

He said, "What does she charge?"

"Twenty-five bucks for the regular thing," Donovan said. "She'll give you an hour of her time for that. There's a sliding scale for specialties, if you go in for stuff like that. And it's a hundred bucks for all night. It's about standard."

"Fine," Markell said. "Give me her telephone number, will you?"

Donovan took a page from his note pad and printed the number laboriously. "Here," he said. "It's an answering serv-

ice. You call up and leave your phone number, and then when she gets around to it she calls you back."

Markell pocketed the slip. "You won't say a word to Janet about this?"

"Are you kidding? Me, doublecross a fellow husband?" Donovan asked indignantly.

Markell laughed. "I didn't think you would, really. But I'm sort of new at this kind of operation."

"How long have you and Janet been married? Ten years, is it?"

"Nine years last June."

"Nine years of marriage and you never stepped out on her *once*?" Donovan asked incredulously.

Markell shrugged in an off-hand way. "Oh, there were one or two little incidents at summer resorts. But they were sort of things that just happened, you know. Quick impulses. It isn't like this. It isn't like all this cold-blooded planning in advance, and *paying* for it."

"But it's simpler this way," Donovan said. "And easier, too. When you need a woman in a hurry, you can't wait around for a little incident to happen."

"Yes," Markell said. "Simpler this way."

He left the restaurant at quarter past two, a solid, substantial meal in his belly, and walked the six blocks up Fifth Avenue to his office. At forty, Markell was unquestionably a successful man. As head of a medium-sized real estate brokerage firm, he had already piled up a personal fortune comfortably along in six figures. He had an annual take-home pay in five high figures. He owned a fine Tudor-style mansion in one of the better Westchester towns. He had a beautiful wife.

The only flaws in his existence were on the matter of the beautiful wife. She was unable to have children, for one thing. A tumor eight years ago had settled that. And she seemed to have lost all interest in sex, lately.

It puzzled and bewildered Markell. He could remember the early years of their marriage, when Janet had been warm, loving, passionate. Those days, he was hardly able to wait for the day to end, so he could be together with her in bed.

But things had changed. As he had grown wealthier, Janet had surrounded herself with a high wall of hobbies, and somehow the hobbies drained off all her energies.

She was so busy these days with the Garden Club and the United Nations Association and the Symphonic League and the City Cleanup Campaign and all her myriad other organizations that she seemed to have no time left for the basic matter of making love to her husband.

Markell resented it. He tried to complain to her, but she shrugged it off. She was seeing a psychiatrist, these days—it cost him \$60 a week—but so far the headshrinker had told her nothing except that her frigidity was a "hostility phase" that would require several years of intensive therapy to remove.

The therapy had been going on for six months now, and the only result Markell observed was that Janet now had a fine new vocabulary to use when she explained why she didn't care to sleep with him on a particular night. Now she could talk about "resistances" and "negative transferences" and a lot of

other fancy things.

But the fundamental fact was unaltered. Their marriage was at a standstill. And, as a healthy and vigorous man still in the prime of his life, Markell was determined to do something about it.

Lunch with Donovan today was the first step. Donovan was *always* philandering. He was famous for it. It hadn't been hard to get him to bring the conversation around to a specific girl who was available to anybody with a price.

And now Markell had her number.

He slid in behind his broad desk. His secretary came bustling up to him with the list of messages taken during his absence. He waved her aside.

"In a moment, Miss Falk, in a moment. I've got an important phone call to make first."

He spread the sheet of newspaper out in front of him on his desk. Donovan had printed the name ANITA, and a telephone number:

He picked up the receiver. He began to dial.

THERE were three rings, and then a professional oper-

ator-voice said, "Whom do you wish to speak to, please?"

Markell hesitated a moment. "A-Anita," he said.

"Yes, sir. Certainly, sir." Strict mechanical properness. "She is not available at the moment, sir. May I have your number and the time you would prefer to be called back, please?"

"Yes," Markell said. He moistened his lips, squeezed the receiver tensely, gave the operator his number. "Have her call me before half past five. That's my business number, you understand."

"Certainly, sir. And the name?"

He paused a moment, wondering. "Fred," he said. "Just *Fred*."

"Thank you, sir."

There was a click. Markell put the receiver down slowly. So that was all there was to it, he thought. Just call up and leave your number. And then wait. Wait and wait and wait.

He tried to do his regular work. There were papers to sign, phone calls to return, documents to draft. He worked with only half his mind. His concentration centered on this

girl, this Anita.

What would she be like?

A tall stacked blonde half his age. That's what Donovan had said. A knockout.

He wondered. If she was as beautiful as all that, he considered, why would she be in that sort of business? Why not be a movie star, a model, or even just some executive's wife? Why should a really good-looking girl become a call girl?

He knew he was being naive. Obviously she *was* good-looking or Donovan would never have recommended her. After all, Donovan had his own reputation as a connoisseur to maintain. So maybe the girl just *liked* being what she was. Or found that she made more money that way than any other. Who knew the reason? Who could ever understand the first little thing about what made a woman tick?

Not me, Markell admitted bleakly.

As the afternoon wore along, he grew more and more impatient. Most likely she slept late, till two or three or four in the afternoon. And then she woke, and phoned her answering service, and got the list of the new

clients and their numbers. And started calling them.

He had left his personal phone number. It was a direct wire from the outside. It didn't go through the switchboard or even through his secretary's desk.

He had set up the phone that way so he could be sure of no eavesdroppers on important business calls. He had never dreamed that one day he would be waiting for word from a call girl on that same telephone.

Around quarter to four, the phone finally rang. Markell snatched it up with feverish impatience.

"Hello, is this Fred?" The voice was soft, husky, sensual—everything that a woman's voice had to be in order to embody the essence of sex.

"Y-yes."

"Hello, Fred. This is Anita. You called me?"

"That's right. A friend of mine gave me your number at lunch today. He—"

"All right," she broke in. "What kind of arrangements would you like to make?"

She was really down-to-Earth, Markell thought. No time wasted in chit-chat. Strict-

ly business.

He said, "I thought maybe we could get together for an hour this evening—"

"Sorry, Fred. I've already got other engagements for tonight. I could see you 'around two in the morning tomorrow, I guess—"

"No, that wouldn't do. I'd have to be home by then, and I live outside the city."

"What about Friday night at nine?" she suggested.

Just like making an appointment with the dentist, Markell thought. Only the treatment is more fun. He checked his engagement book with his left hand. "Friday night at nine—yes, that's okay," he said.

"You have any place special you want me to meet you?" she asked.

"I thought we'd got to a hotel."

"Okay," she said. "You take care of the booking. My stop just before you is Third Avenue and 51st Street, so get a hotel room somewhere in that vicinity. After you've booked the room, phone my answering service, tell them the name of the hotel, the number of the room. I'll be there at nine

o'clock sharp Friday night. Okay?"

"Okay," Markell said.

"See you Friday, Freddy."

She hung up.

Everything cool, calm, and collected, Markell thought. A real businesswoman. A pro. He could appreciate efficiency. He liked the way she had things organized. If she was half as good in bed as she seemed to be in running her business, Friday was going to be a memorable evening indeed.

HE left the office at twenty after five that night, walked briskly over to Grand Central, and just barely made the 5:31. Seventy minutes later, he was home. It was a brisk autumn evening, cool and clear.

Janet didn't come out to greet him. Markell walked inside and found his wife in the study, diligently typing out envelopes.

She looked up at him. She was an attractive brunette, a little on the thin side, with good legs and an alert, intelligent face. Markell had hoped, when he married her, that her bosom would fill out a little when she had some children. But there

hadn't been any children, and she still wore a padded bra. Otherwise, she was a good-looking woman in every way.

"Evening, Fred."

"What are you so busy with?"

"I volunteered to type the addresses for the PTA's meeting notices," she said. "Hundreds and hundreds. I've been typing all day. God, am I beat!"

So it was going to be another one of those days, Markell thought grimly. "I don't suppose you've been able to take time out for preparing dinner," he said. "And this *is* Ethel's night off."

Janet gasped. "I forgot all about what time it was! I got so enwrapped in all this typing—"

"That's all right," he said easily. "I had a big lunch today anyway. Jack Donovan wanted to sell me some parcels in New Jersey. Strictly swampland."

"You didn't buy?"

"No," Markell said. "But it wasn't a completely wasted lunch after all." *No indeed*, he thought. "No deal, but at least I had a damned good filet mig-

non at Brother Donovan's expense. And I'm still a little full. So if you'll just put together some kind of salad, that'll be enough dinner for me—"

Janet nodded and headed into the kitchen. It was always this way, he thought. She got so damned busy with her community activities that she never had any time for him. Almost deliberately, she drained her energies into ridiculous things, and then was too exhausted to perform any of the duties of a wife.

The least she could have done was mixed a few drinks when he came in, he thought. Even if she didn't want to bother with fixing supper.

But she didn't do *anything*. She was strictly a parasite. She lived off him, and served no purpose at all in the household. The PTA probably appreciated her services, he thought. But what the hell kind of marriage was that?

Janet scraped together a sort of dinner. Then it was back to the envelope-addressing for her, while Markell, fuming inwardly, watched television, paid a few bills, answered a couple of letters. The dull evening

dragged away. He wondered who Anita was with, now. What she was doing.

Quarter to eleven. Bedtime. Janet had finished with her envelopes. He walked into their bedroom and there she was, nude before her mirror, combing out her dark hair. He came up behind her. He ran his hands over her small slim breasts, over the smooth curve of her buttocks.

"Hurry up and finish with your hair," he muttered. "Let's go to bed."

She looked at him glumly. "Not tonight, Fred. I'm just not in the mood. I'm *so* tired."

Any other night, he might have started a bitter argument. Tonight he had the promise of Anita to comfort him. He got into bed, and threw a sour look at his wife's nude, inaccessible body.

Go on, he thought. Keep on being a bitch. One of these days you may find yourself tossed out of here on that sexy pink backside of yours. I've tolerated your antics too long, Janet. You'd better watch your step. Anita is only the beginning. The natives are getting restless.

He rolled over on his side and waited for sleep to take him.

FRIDAY finally came. The hours had ticked by leadenly all day Thursday, but now it was Friday, now it was Anita-Day. Markell bubbled with scarcely suppressable excitement all morning. He felt like a kid about to have his first really hot date. He kept looking at his watch, trying to urge the minutes to move along.

At noon, he left his office and took a cab uptown and eastward, getting off at Third Avenue. There was a hotel at Third and 52nd, a shiny new building that hadn't been open more than a few months. He straightened his tie, adjusted the brim of his hat, went inside.

A desk clerk eyed him respectfully. Markell said, in his best top-executive voice, "I'd like a room for this evening."

"Certainly, sir. A single?"

"Make it a double."

"Certainly, sir. Private bath, television set. Eighteen dollars. Would you sign here, please?"

He signed in under the first name that came to his mind—Edward T. Connally—and

beamed at the clerk. They gave him his key. Room 1516. Since he had no luggage, they tactfully suggested that he pay in advance for the room, and he found no objections to that.

"Checkout time is noon tomorrow, Mr. Connally. If you'd like an extension, just notify us at the desk."

"That's all right, thanks. I doubt that I'll be staying longer than planned."

They gave him knowing smiles. He wasn't fooling anybody. These hotel people knew damn well that this was a local businessman who needed a room for a short while for a very specific purpose.

But they didn't give a damn, Markell knew. They weren't in the morality business. They were just interested in selling their rooms, and if two people were going to occupy the room they wanted the room paid for at double the occupancy rent. Period. After that, what he did in the room was his own business, so far as the management was concerned.

From a pay telephone in the hotel lobby, he called Anita's answering service and gave the operator the name of the hotel,

the number of the room, and the time. The rest was up to Anita.

He had a quick light lunch. He didn't have much of an appetite, it seemed. Returning to his office around one, he put through a call to his home.

Janet took her time about answering. Finally she did pick up, with her nonchalant "Hello," and Markell moistened his dry lips and said, "I'm going to be home late tonight, Jan."

"Oh?" she said languidly. She hardly seemed to care.

"Yes, there's a conference that just came up. It'll keep me busy pretty late. We're all going out for dinner, one of those things. I guess I won't be home till after eleven."

"All right, Fred. I've got some U.N. work to do, anyway. Don't wake me when you come in, if I'm asleep."

"I wouldn't dream of waking you, dear," he said tightly. "I wouldn't *dream* of it."

NINE o'clock, now.

Markell sat hunched tensely on the edge of the bed in his hotel room. It was a fancy room, modern furniture, bright-colored walls and car-

peting. He had gone to it at half past eight, after a skimpy dinner and an hour of tensely wandering around Manhattan.

He was on his way through his third cigarette. He had ordered a bottle of Scotch and some mix sent up from Room Service, and he had already gulped down two drinks, with a third half gone. And now, finally, it was nine o'clock. Any minute, Anita would make her appearance.

He wondered how things like this were supposed to go. Would she be expecting him to be undressed and ready for her, or would that be too blunt and unsubtle? Did he pay her before or after? They hadn't even discussed fees. Donovan had told him it was \$25, but that might just be her rate for some people. He didn't know. He realized that for all his forty years he was terribly inexperienced about some things.

No time like the present for learning, he thought. *It's never too late to learn.*

There was a knock at the door.

He sprang up, half tripping over himself in his haste, and then, with a scowl of self-con-

tempt, halted and moved at a more composed pace toward the door. He opened it.

"Hi," a girl said. "I'm Anita."

The first sight of her was like a cold sword being slipped between Markell's ribs. He caught his breath sharply, wincing at the impact of it.

She was beautiful.

She was one of the most beautiful girls he had ever seen.

There was nothing cheap, nothing vulgar, nothing trollopy about her. She was dressed elegantly, her gleaming blonde hair done in a stylish coiffure, a few small pieces of jewelry her only ornaments. She looked like nothing so much as a young wealthy wife out for the evening.

She was only a girl, too, he saw. Her complexion was clear, her eyes wide and blue, her expression somehow an innocent one. He invited her in, his heart pounding fiercely.

"Sorry I'm a few minutes late," she said. "I'll make it up to you, though."

"Care for a drink?"

"A weak one, please."

She settled in the chair, crossing her legs to show a

breathhtaking stretch of leg. Markell fixed a drink for her with trembling hands.

She was in no hurry. She sat and talked for ten minutes or more, chatted about the weather, about politics, about Markell himself. She didn't ask his last name, but she found out almost everything else there was to know about him—the kind of business he was in, his approximate financial bracket, his age, and his troubles with his wife. Especially his troubles with his wife.

She was terribly sympathetic. She was kind and understanding and seemingly sincere. "So many wives cut their own throats that way," she said. "They think that once they've got a man, they can sit back and live off him the rest of their lives without giving anything in return. Which is the whole reason for my profession. I sometimes think. If there were less frigid neurotic wives around, there wouldn't be a call-girl industry."

"I agree," Markell said. "I agree a hundred percent." He had had four highballs by now, and he felt a little light-headed. He wondered when Anita was

going to get around to the business at hand. Did she always talk first? Was that part of the routine? Or was she simply waiting for him to make a pass?

She seemed to notice his impatience, seemed almost to be reading his mind. For, finishing her drink, she stood up, began to undress—all the while giving him a warm, loving smile. Markell had to admit that it was a tremendous act. She was a really polished pro. There was nothing sordid or whorish about the way she was undressing.

She was doing it as though they had been lovers for years, as though it was the most natural thing in the world that she would be taking her clothes off in front of him.

He watched her.

Her body was stunning, a thing of pink and gold, with incredibly lovely full firm breasts and excitingly contoured buttocks, with pale beautiful hips and thighs.

She stood naked before him, glorying in her taut-fleshed young nudity, and Markell felt a pang of sadness at the realization that this was all pretense, that an hour ago she had been

sleeping with somebody else, that an hour from now she would be standing nude in front of another man, that over the past months she had been had by hundreds and hundreds of men.

That there was nothing to be proud of in the thought of being privileged to feast his eyes on such wonderful naked beauty, because anybody with the right phone number and some loose cash could have the same privilege.

He advanced toward her. His trembling hands closed on ripe, exciting flesh.

She was smiling tenderly. She pressed herself up against him. Markell gave himself up to her completely, surrendering to the hypnotic spell of her flawless body, and she gathered him in, carried him off to a realm of utter delight.

AFTERWARD, he lay tired and happy on the bed, watching her dress. It was a pity, he thought, that such beauty should be covered up. She snapped her bra, drew her panties up over the satiny globes of her buttocks.

He said, "When will I see you again?"

"You have the number, Freddy."

"But you may be booked up for weeks!"

"I never take a booking more than a week in advance," she said. "And I've usually got an hour or two open up till the day before."

"I wish I could have you all the time."

She grinned. "I'm expensive. Can you pay \$500 a week for my upkeep?"

"I doubt it."

"Well, that's about how much I make as a free-lancer. If you can match it, I'm yours. For a while."

"For a while?" he said.

"Until I get restless," she said. She yawned voluptuously. "I'm a very restless girl. But I like you, Freddy. You're a real *man*, if you know what I mean. And I think you do." She came over to the bed, kissed him. "I'm looking forward to seeing you again. Again and again and again."

She finished dressing, and tactfully asked him for \$25. He had it all ready for her, in a hotel envelope. She took the

envelope without opening it, put it in her purse, waved him a cheery goodbye, and left.

It was five after ten. She had been with him exactly an hour. A real pro, he thought admiringly. So much time for preliminary small-talk, so much time for business itself, so much time afterward for a lingering farewell.

He thought again of the beauty of her, of the savage pulsing pleasure that she had given him, and a tight band of tension wrapped itself around his waist. He couldn't bear to think of her going on and on, selling herself to a multitude of men. He wanted her.

She was a treasure, he thought. She had a wonderful way of making a man feel really *masculine*. On those increasingly rare occasions when he had made love to his own wife recently, Janet had managed by word and deed to chop him down, to needle him, to deflate his ego. Anita did just the opposite. She built a man up.

He was still in a dreamy glow as he left the hotel, twenty minutes later. He surrendered his key at the desk, paid his Room Service charge for

the liquor, and drifted out into the night, feeling completely satisfied with himself and the world. He caught a cab to Grand Central and got there just in time to make the 10:43.

He was home just before midnight. Janet was sound asleep. He undressed and slipped into bed beside her, careful not to wake her. Let her sleep, he thought. And let her spend her days addressing envelopes or doing whatever else she damned pleased. He didn't mind, not now. He had other ways of gaining satisfaction.

He slept that night as soundly as he had slept at any time in the past ten years.

MARKELL fell easily into the pleasant habit of seeing Anita twice a week. It became a regular part of his routine of living. Anita told him that she never saw anybody before seven in the evening—she usually worked from seven to about two or three, unless she had some special job—but she agreed to make an exception for him once a week.

Every Tuesday, he came to her apartment at four in the afternoon. She woke up at two or

three, and usually by four she was still wandering around the apartment in the nude, which made things all the more convenient. She lived in one of the luxury apartment houses on the Upper East Side.

That was Tuesday. He told his staff that he had to leave the office early on Tuesdays, and no one questioned him.

On Fridays, he saw Anita at eight in the evening, at a hotel room he rented for the purpose. They stayed together till nine, sometimes half past nine, and then he went home to Janet.

Janet didn't seem to mind. In fact, she seemed definitely delighted that the nasty subject of sex hardly ever appeared to come under discussion now. Occasionally, to keep up appearances, Markell would make love to his cold, unwilling wife. But most of the time he just left her alone. Anita gave him more than ample satisfaction.

He wasn't sure just when he conceived the idea of asking Anita to marry him. Perhaps it was the third week, perhaps the fourth, of their steady relationship. The idea didn't spring full-blown into his head. It crept stealthily out of his un-

conscious, until finally it possessed him completely.

At first glance the idea seemed ridiculous. Marry a call girl? Who would do such a grotesque thing? But the more he thought about it, the more sense it made to him.

For one thing, she was beautiful. No argument on that score. For another, she was talented sexually. He had ample proof of that. For a third thing, she was young. She would remain beautiful for the remaining twenty or twenty-five years of his active life.

If, later on, he couldn't satisfy her and she wanted to take lovers, he wouldn't mind that, he told himself. At least he would have had her all to himself for many years.

On the other hand, there was the drawback that she had slept with scores of men. Markell considered that. Did it really matter? Nobody was a virgin any more, at least nobody that got married past the age of sixteen or so.

Janet had had four or five lovers before he had married her, and he hadn't cared about that. Once you married a woman who had slept around, did

it matter whether she had slept with four or four hundred men?

Yes, it did. Because the one who had slept with four hundred men would be vastly more knowledgeable, vastly more experienced. She could be endlessly fresh, endlessly challenging in bed. Unless you were very moralistic, it made more sense to marry an expert in the art of love than it did to marry an inhibited, inexperienced girl.

Of course, it would be awkward if people found out about her past. *You* didn't care, but they might. That was the one tricky factor here. He didn't know how many of his friends and business associates had slept with Anita. Jack Donovan, for certain. Others, quite possibly. Donovan was given to passing phone numbers around. A lot of eyebrows might get raised if Markell announced his engagement to a girl everybody had been to bed with.

And then, there was the problem of what to do about Janet.

Divorce didn't look too likely. He had no grounds for divorcing her, and not even the thrawdest lawyer around was likely to work up any kind of

case against her. She was cold, yes, but frigidity isn't grounds for divorce.

On the other hand, he doubted that he could make her divorce *him*. She led a nice plush life now, and he would really have to work at it to make her want to pull out. Even if he came home drunk night after night, slapped her around, brought other women into the house, she'd probably try to bear with him.

Or else she would take him to court and squeeze him for every penny she could get. Janet was perfectly capable of bleeding a man white, Markell realized. And the court, presented with the case of a faithful husband suddenly turning into an ogre, would see immediately that here was a man deliberately trying to force his wife to divorce him, and so the price of his liberty would be steep.

He didn't want to turn huge sums over to Janet.

But he wanted to be rid of her. And she was too damned healthy to die naturally any time in the next forty or fifty years. Markell couldn't wait that long.

THE weeks passed. And an idea started to crystallize, an idea that involved Janet and Jack Donovan, an idea that might just solve a couple of his problems.

"Still seeing Anita?" Donovan asked, as they met for lunch one day close to Christmas.

Markell nodded. "A couple of times a week."

"Great girl, isn't she?"

"Tremendous," Markell said.

Donovan stared at him levelly. "You're pretty hipped on her, aren't you? I mean, not just as a call girl, but something beyond that."

"Maybe."

"You ought to watch out for that," Donovan said. "These girls, they try to get you to fall in love with them, they try to make you think they love you, only you. Meanwhile they're sleeping with half of New York, but they tell you you're special. And they soak you. Bought her any gifts yet?"

"A few," Markell said, tight-lipped. He didn't like Donovan's cynical approach.

"There you are. That's the beginning. Next thing you know, you'll be thinking about

marrying her. There's always some damn fool who wants to marry a call girl. Men never learn."

Markell ran his tongue nervously around his lips. "Listen," he said, "let's get off the subject and onto a different one. Like next weekend."

"What about it?" Donovan asked.

"You said your wife would be visiting her parents in California next week, remember? So I was talking with Janet, and she suggested we invite you to stay with us. We wouldn't want you to have to spend a lonely bachelor weekend all by yourself."

"Well, as a matter of fact," Donovan said, "I was thinking of lining up a little companionship for myself for that weekend. But I hadn't arranged anything yet."

"Good. Come on up to our place. We can discuss that Long Island deal, for one thing. And you can just relax in front of our fireplace and help reduce our liquor supply. Janet will *love* to see you. You know how fond she's always been of you."

"Yes," Donovan said dryly.

There was an odd look in his eyes. Markell knew that Donovan had been interested in Janet for years and years. But he had had so little opportunity to be alone with her.

Markell was determined to give Donovan that opportunity next weekend.

"Is it a date for the weekend?" Markell asked.

"Okay," Donovan said. "It's a date."

WHEN he saw Anita the following Tuesday, Markell told her that he wouldn't be free for their regular Friday meeting. "We're having a weekend guest," he said. "He's coming up Friday night. So we'll just have to skip it this week."

"A n y b o d y I know?" she asked playfully.

He ducked the question. "Somebody I do business with some of the time," he said evasively.

"I'm going to miss you Friday night, Freddy."

"I'll miss you too. But we'll be able to see each other more often than twice a week, soon. A lot more often."

"Oh?"

"I'm planning--I'm plan-

ning some changes," he said. "Big changes."

"Tell me, lover."

He shook his head. "I don't dare. You'll find out when the time comes. But I tell you one thing. I'll be able to see a lot more of you after it happens. Would you like that, Anita?"

"Of course, Freddy."

"Would you like to see me a whole lot?" he asked carefully. "Like every day?"

"Why not?" she asked, running her fingers through his hair. "I like you, Freddy. I like you plenty."

He left the matter at that. He didn't want to do too much talking ahead of the fact, too much bridge-crossing in advance. Just so long as Anita was fond of him, he could go through with what he had planned, knowing that when he finally did get to the other side of the bridge he would possess the kind of happiness he had never dreamed was possible to attain.

Friday came. He had arranged to meet Donovan at Grand Central about half past four—to beat the weekend rush—and there he was, standing by the newsstand where

they had agreed to meet, a weekend bag at his feet. They boarded the train, went to the bar car for martinis, then settled down for the ride. It was a dark, wintry afternoon, a hint of snow in the air outside.

Markell thought of Anita. He thought of Donovan sleeping with Anita. He reminded himself that it was this man who had first given him Anita's phone number.

They reached the Markell house by six. Janet was glad to see Donovan; she welcomed him warmly—*suspiciously* warmly. Markell thought, though at this point he hardly had any objection to that. They settled down in the livingroom, Markell putting up a blazing fire while Janet mixed drinks.

Janet seemed lively and animated—more so than she had seemed for months. She was wearing a tight sweater and pair of corduroy pedalpushers, and her figure was on open display, stressing the fine lines of her hips and legs. Markell had known for a long time that there was an attraction between Donovan and Janet. But they had had so little opportunity to

be alone together. Markell had seen to that.

But now everything was different. *Let them do what they damn please*, he thought.

They spent a cozy evening in front of the fire, the three of them. They talked—about real estate, about the stock market, about Donovan's wife, about the international situation. About midnight, Janet suggested it was time to get some sleep.

Markell had been watching her carefully. She was keyed up, excited about having an unattached man in the house. Donovan was sleeping downstairs, in the guest room. Markell wondered whether things would actually get as far as he was expecting them to.

THE next morning, just before noon, the phone rang. He had arranged that with his switchboard girl on Friday afternoon.

Janet answered. "It's for you," she said, handing the phone to him. "A girl. Calling from New York."

He took the phone, spoke into it briefly. Across the room, Janet and Donovan were laughing over some joke. Markell ex-

changed a few words with the girl, then hung up. He walked over to join the other two.

"Afraid I'm going to be a lousy host today, people," he said with a shrug. "That was my secretary calling. There's been some legal foul-up in a title closing, and I've got to go to the city right away."

"Can't it wait till Monday, Fred?"

"I wish it could," Markell said. "But if I'm not there by three o'clock this afternoon, they're going to void the contract. Which means forfeiture of all fees, surveying costs, and whatnot. I'll be out about five thousand, altogether. I don't have any choice but to go."

Donovan chuckled. "I guess we can hold the fort while you're away, Fred."

"Yes," Markell said. "The two of you will just have to manage without me. Play gin rummy, or something. It's a hell of a thing to do, skipping out on a weekend guest, but it can't be helped."

"How long will you be down there?" Janet asked, a trifle warily.

Markell shrugged. "The conference will last at least two

hours, rock bottom. And then about an hour or so to get back home. Figure I'll be back here between six-thirty and seven o'clock. Probably no later than seven, and certainly no earlier than half past six. Wait dinner for me, will you?"

Both Janet and Donovan seemed to be pitying him for having to go out into the wintry cold on a Saturday, when he could be home by the fireplace. But they made no attempt to talk him out of making the trip. They seemed quite prepared to while away the next five or six hours without him.

He slipped into his warm winter coat and left the house a little past one o'clock. Janet offered to drive him down to the railway station, but it was only an eight-block walk, and he preferred to do it on foot.

He walked down to the station, circled it, headed back to the house, taking Laurel Crescent, the undeveloped dirt road that ran up the rear way. From Laurel Crescent he could enter his own property from the back, crossing the rear yard and getting to the garage unnoticed.

From the garage, he could

watch the house.

Warily, he moved through the quiet afternoon, through the deserted area. No one lived back here yet. The developers would be around with their bulldozers in the spring, but as of now it was empty. Ideal territory for skulking through. He could see his house, now. Just another couple of hundred yards ahead.

He stepped through the hedges onto his grounds and made his way toward the garage. He had been gone about half an hour, now. Plenty of time for mischief to get started. The garage had two entrances, the main one for cars, and a small door in the side. He unlocked the side door and went in.

It was a detached garage, set back about seventy feet from the house. The garage was on the biggish side, a two-story garage, and they had furnished the upper room as a storage area and a rumpus room if they ever had children. The single window gave a good view of the back of the house.

And the bedrooms were in the back.

Markell pulled up an empty

trunk and settled down to watch.

The one thing he was afraid of was a mistake in timing. He didn't want to make his entry too early or too late. Give them time, lots of time, he thought. He hoped they wouldn't do it on the living room couch or someplace like that, invisible from the garage vantage-point.

He waited.

Half an hour crawled by. He caught sight of Janet once, fully dressed, going into the kitchen for something. Fifteen minutes later, Donovan was visible for an instant in one of the other rear windows. He was dressed, too.

It would be a whopping anticlimax, Markell thought, if nothing at all happened. But somehow he clung to his original confidence that everything would happen as he predicted. He continued to wait.

It was three o'clock, now. It was fiercely cold in the unheated garage, and he was shivering, his lips going blue in the cold. He hugged himself for warmth and wondered what the hell was taking Donovan so long. Two hours ought to be

enough time to get things started.

And then he saw what he was waiting to see.

Janet, nude, looking out one of the back windows. He ducked out of sight. She wouldn't bother drawing the blinds—there was nobody back here to see, she would reason. There she was, though. He could see her small breasts, her swelling hips. And there was Donovan, dimly visible behind her.

This was it, Markell thought. He studied his watch. Give them five minutes, no more.

He let five minutes tick past.

He left the garage and quietly moved toward the house. The safety was off his gun. He had bought the gun when they had first moved this far out of the city—you needed some kind of protection, he had argued, when the nearest house was a few hundred feet away. He had never used the gun. But his Army days were only sixteen years in the past. He still remembered which end of a gun you pointed at the target.

He entered the house silently.

He tiptoed up the stairs.

He pushed open the bedroom door.

Janet and Donovan were on the bed—the marital bed, Markell thought with a pang. They were both nude.

He lifted the gun. It was dangerous to hesitate, now. Dangerous to stop and think. They saw him. They were sitting up.

"For God's sake, Fred!" Donovan yelled hoarsely.

The bullet smashed into his throat, and he dropped over onto the floor, gurgling and spouting blood.

"Fred! No!" Janet screamed.

He fired again. The slug drilled a hole between her little breasts. She dropped back against the pillow.

Markell was quivering violently. He wanted to rush into the bathroom and retch.

He put the gun down. On numb legs he walked down the hallway, picked up the extension phone.

"Hello," he said. "Give me the police."

THERE was a trial, of course. It caused a local sensation and kept the tabloids buzzing for a week or so. Mar-

kell testified that he had left his house on business, but that he had decided not to go into the city after all. He had returned and found his friend in bed with his wife. Snatching up a pistol that he kept in the bedroom drawer, he had killed them both.

Janet's psychiatrist was called to the stand and reluctantly testified to the dead woman's instability. He admitted that she had often talked of infidelities.

The local police testified that the victims had indeed been nude and in bed together when shot.

The coroner testified that sexual relations had been taking place between the victims just prior to their death.

The jury was out no more than half an hour. They found the accused Frederick Markell guilty of second-degree manslaughter under extreme provocation, and recommended leniency.

Markell drew a two-year suspended sentence. A month after the murder, he walked out of court a free man.

He had big plans.

He had carefully kept away

from Anita during his month of legal maneuvering. He had no doubt that the prosecution was keeping tabs on him, and he didn't want to give them any reason to think that he might have wanted to be rid of his wife. But he waited until a proper interval had passed. Then, one afternoon, he dropped in uninvited at Anita's East Side apartment.

She came to the door looking sleepy and surprised all at once. She was wearing only a gauzy nightgown that hid little of her full-fleshed beauty. Markell, who had been living a life of purity for a month, felt his entire body go tense with desire at the sight of those lush breasts and rounded thighs scarcely concealed by her gown.

"Freddy!"

"Hi, Anita," he said with a grin. "Long time no see, huh?"

"Gosh, Freddy!"— She seemed taken aback, her poise and professional calm deserting her. "You should have called first!"

"Why? Got company here?" he asked.

"No, but—but it would have given me some time to get washed up, presentable. So the

trial's all over!"

"Yes," he said. "I'm a free man. I hope you understood why I couldn't call you all these weeks."

She nodded. "Sure, I saw that." She was looking at him strangely. "You must have really blown your top. Killing your wife like that. And Jack. Poor Jack. He didn't deserve that, Fred. Your own friend. And your wife was just a bitch anyway."

Markell shrugged. "I had to. I didn't want to, but Janet had to get put out of the way. It was simpler all around to kill Jack too."

"You mean—"

"And now I'm a free man," he went on. He rubbed his hands. "Some time this spring, we can get married, Anita. At long last."

"*Married?*" she said, as though thunderstruck.

He blinked. "Of course. Why do you think I'd do a thing like that? Not out of jealousy, certainly."

"But—but—" Her lips were trembling. "Who said anything about marriage, Fred?"

"Why—I assumed—remember when I said we'd soon be

together all the time?"

She shrugged. "I figured you meant you'd be taking me over as a full-time mistress for a while."

"I meant marriage."

"But—no, Fred. This is ridiculous. I don't want to marry you. You or anybody else."

"I killed Janet so I could marry you," he said, gaping.

She shook her head. "I was married once, Fred. I couldn't stand it. One man, thinking he owned me. I'm not a monogamous girl. I get tired of a man after six, seven months. Sometimes even quicker."

"I'm rich, Anita. I can give you everything you dream of."

"I'm rich too," she said. "I got a fat settlement from my husband, and I earn plenty doing what I do. I'd rather have my freedom. You keep your money."

"But—but—"

"It wouldn't work, Fred. I'd be cheating you inside a few months. That's what my nature is. And then—Gosh, Fred, you might shoot me. Just the way you shot Janet. I'm afraid of you, Fred. A man who'd shoot one wife would shoot another."

"I swear—I'd never harm you—"

"You never planned to harm Janet, either." She was wild-eyed, now. "I'm scared, Fred. Get out of here. I don't want to see you any more. What you did was crazy, killing your wife. I couldn't dream of marrying you. Especially after—after—" She giggled. "A call girl marrying a murderer. Some marriage that would be. Go on! Get out!"

"No!" he cried. "I want to marry you!"

"Don't be a nuisance, Fred."

"If I can't marry you I'll kill you," he said. "You did this to me! You made me kill my own friend—my wife—you Jezebel! If I can't have you nobody will!" He lurched forward hysterically, arms outstretched. She eluded his grasp. He swung around, caught her gown's edge, ripped it away. She was nude now, and that only inflamed him all the more.

"Kill you," he grunted. "Nobody's going to have you if I can't have you—"

She dodged around him, ran into the next room. He followed her. There she was,

standing next to the bed, now. Naked, her heavy breasts heaving excitedly. She was reaching into the desk drawer, taking something out—

"Anita!" he wailed.

"Leave me alone, Fred!"

He looked at her, naked and stunningly beautiful, her body gleaming with sweat, her breasts rising and falling, her nudity maddening him to berserk fervor.

He saw the little gun in her hand.

He charged forward like a bull in a rut. She screamed, and he stopped short a few steps from her as the first shot caught him in the belly. He dropped to his knees, blood starting to spurt from him. She was standing above him. He lifted his head, past the splendor of her thighs, past the flaring beauty of her naked hips, past the deep bowls of her breasts, to her face.

She was laughing now. The emergency was over.

"You damned fool," she said.

The next shot smashed through his brain.

THE END