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# Die, and You'll

Spine-Chilling Novelette of  
the Wilderness Country

By

KEN LEWIS

## CHAPTER ONE

Voice from the Wilderness

**O**LD Man Hardy was waiting for him when he got to the office that morning, and Mallory didn't like it. The last time the old man got up that early, his ace investigator had drawn an assignment which involved three fresh corpses. And Mallory was essentially a mild man. He did not like corpses.

"Mike," Old Man Hardy said, smiling

# Wear Diamonds!

*It was a weird world, filled with mocking echoes that Mallory walked into at Loon Lake—where lived a Shakespearean scholar-recluse, his strange, "gifted" son, and his red-headed, half-breed sweetheart . . . with only a bejewelled corpse for company!*



She moaned, softly, clutching her ankle. . . .

a little balefully, "What you need is a vacation!"

Mallory did a double-take. "Now wait a minute, Boss!" he said quickly. "You just sit back there and relax. I'll have a doctor here in a matter of minutes!"

"A week or so in the Minnesota lake country," went on the president of Hardy Investigations, blandly oblivious of his employee's concern. "How do you like wall-eyed pike, Mike? Of course I'll pay all the expenses. . ."

"Of course!" Mallory said suspiciously. "You always do. Only sometimes we have to threaten suit first."

His boss waved an expansive hand. "I've made all the arrangements. You take the 8:27 streamliner for Minneapolis, switch there to the bus for Duluth. That ought to get you to Loon Lake sometime early tomorrow morning."

Mallory swallowed. Then he began to breathe more easily. The Old Man hadn't lost all his marbles, after all. He, Mallory, was not really being offered a paid-up vacation in the midst of the manpower shortage. . . Loon Lake was just the place where their old friend, Joey Summers, had last been heard from.

MOTHER McGruder's Bar and Grill sprawled lonely and unpainted, like a festering man-made scab scarring the edge of the evergreen forest two miles from the lake. Mallory stood on the shoulder of Highway 61, where the Duluth-bound bus had let him off, and viewed it darkly.

He had a long green topcoat on his back, a snub-nosed automatic in his shoulder holster, a scuffed brown valise in his left hand, and a longing for Chicago in his heart. But this was where the call had come from, he reminded himself. Joey Summers' last call. . .

"Got the stuff," Joey had said. "Taking the night bus back." There had followed two eloquent hiccoughs and the sound of the connection clicking dead. That was all. Mallory knew, because he had taken the call.

And sometimes during the intervening week this wilderness of trees and rocks and lakes had swallowed Joey, and with him, a diamond booch, a diamond ring, and an emerald ring worth \$25,000. . .

Mallory sighed and hefted the valise. He pushed the front door open and stepped into the dingy tavern.

The woman behind the bar was short and square, with lank mustard-colored hair done in a bun at the back, and a round pouchy face. She slapped down a Liberator-size mosquito which was the room's only other occupant, and eyed Mallory sourly.

"What's yours?"

Mallory winced. She had the kind of voice which always made him want to change the needle.

"I'm looking for a guy who made a reverse-charge phone call from here last Saturday." He described Summers—tall, dark, hawkfaced. "Probably had a few drinks first. Remember him?"

"No."

The word was flat and final. Mallory sighed. Mother McGruder would never inspire any Irish ballads, he thought. For one thing, she needed a shave.

"Have many customers? Now, during the slack season?" he persisted.

Her watery eyes curdled. "Listen, short, fat and copperish! This place gets so stinkin' with guides and lake trash every Saturday I ain't got time to keep track of 'em all, even if I wanted to. Maybe this guy was in, maybe he wasn't. I wouldn't know."

Mallory accepted the personal description philosophically. His purposefully drab appearance gave little indication of the surprising wallop he packed in both stubby fists, or the alert mind hiding behind his sharp blue eyes. To Mother McGruder he was merely a graying, middle-aged little man with a placid Irish face and a slightly paunchy middle.

He glanced at the pay phone anchored in plain sight at one end of the bar, and he knew that, once seen, Joey Summers would be remembered.

"Okay. Let it ride," he said dryly. "How do I get to Bushey's Camp?"

"You just get off the bus?"

He nodded.

"Then the shortest way's to take the dirt road west and turn off at the path through the old cemetery. The road winds around a couple miles farther before it cuts back. . . Hope you brought your hip boots, Copper." She grinned malevolently.

Mallory shifted his valise. "What, no taxis?" he snapped.

Somewhere Mallory had heard about Minnesota sunsets. Trudging along the dirt road west, he decided this was strictly Chamber of Commerce. How could a place where the sun never shone have beautiful sunsets?

Morning mist dripped from the evergreens walling the muddy, rutted track and now and then a tern screamed or a dove mourned in the darkling woods to his right. Once through a break in the trees he caught the dull, metallic sheen of lake water and heard the soft slap-swish of small waves.

He had slogged almost two miles through the ankle-deep mud before he came to a little hillside clearing filled with rotted headstones. The path Mother McGruder had mentioned snaked among the graves and lost itself in the trees beyond.

This part of the country had undergone a near cloudburst four days before. Mallory was reminded of that when he slipped on a needle-covered rock at the path's edge and fell flat on his face, plastering the front of his topcoat with rich black ooze.

Cursing, he pulled himself to his knees. And it was then that he saw the shoe. Rain-water had dug a small gully along a row of graves to his left, and the shoe protruded into this ditch from the end of one of the mounds.

It had a man's foot in it.

Mallory hunched forward, dogwise. He felt himself beginning to tremble. His first thought was that they didn't make shoes like this anymore—for the stone above the grave said "Lars Olsen, 1858-1903." Yet the leather had hardly begun to age!

Then he looked at the shoe again, and his breakfast began to churn. For the shoe looked very familiar. It looked as if he had found Joey Summers already.

He got up and carefully plastered the black oxford with mud until it was once more hidden. He noticed that there was no grass growing above the grave. Only a carefully laid mat of cones and needles. He added to this mat until it covered the new lump at the end of the mound.

Then he wiped his muddy hands on a branch, unbuttoned his coat and pulled the .32 from its shoulder holster. Dropping the gun in an outer topcoat pocket, he moved on up the path.

**T**HE boy and girl broke apart suddenly when Mallory came upon them five minutes later. They'd been close-huddled on a blanket covered log beyond a turn in the path, and the boy's face was splotted with purplish lipstick.

It was a lopsided, bumpkinesque face with thick, pouting lips and queer blue eyes. It was topped with a shock of shaggy brown hair.

The girl was something else. Burnished copper curls matched her flashing green eyes and the slender quirk of her mouth. But the hair had never come naturally with those high, primitive cheekbones or dark lustrous skin. There was a hard wildness about her—a wierd beauty which made Mallory suck in his breath, despite the flannel shirt and overalls she wore.

"My Lord," he thought. "At my age!"

The boy spoke first, in a voice as odd as his eyes—a curious plastic voice which seemed to play with the scale. "Who the hell are you?" it said. "And whatcha snoopin' around here fer?"

Mallory eyed him bleakly. The kid had a big soft body beneath its blue denims, he decided. "I want Alvin Bushey," he snapped.

The queer blue eyes stared back, inscrutable, and the face grew even more lopsided as it tightened.

"What for?"

"I'll tell him when I find him."

The kid stood up. He began to sidle forward, shuffling oddly like a polar bear. The kid stopped. He grinned suddenly. "Okay," he said. "I'm Egbert Bushey. Pop's down at the shack, I guess. Keep right on goin'."

Mallory's eyes flicked back to the girl. He saw that she had cupped her hands around one knee, left hand outermost, so that it covered the set of the ring he had already noticed on her right hand. But he remembered the frosty green glint of the stone which matched her eyes.

He had never seen Deborah Lysander's jewelry—the jewelry Joey Summers had been sent here to recover. But he had a good description of it. And one of the items had been an emerald ring. . . He thought about that as he walked on down the path. He had rounded another bend and gone perhaps five hundred yards when the sound of his own voice began to echo hollowly from the wall of green to his right.

"I want Alvin Bushey," it said. "I want Alvin Bushey. . ."

He froze in his tracks, the short hairs

prickling at the nape of his neck. Unconsciously he clamped his jaws together, listening. . .

"I'll tell him when I find him," his voice said. "I'll tell him when I find him. . ."

Damn it, it was his *own* voice!

He wheeled to race slipping and sliding back up the path.

When he reached the turn, he saw that the blanket-covered log was empty. His hand dropped from his coat pocket.

A derisive, highpitched peal of laughter skirled from the woods to his left. It began again—this time to his right—shreds of falsetto sound hanging in the dank air like smoke.

His pulse stopped racing then and his eyes contracted. He had the answer. . . He chuckled a little—sardonically, without mirth—as some of the fog shrouding Joey Summers' disappearance began to lift from the corners of his mind.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Corpse Wore Diamonds

**F**ASHIONED of logs and mortar, the cabin was neat and trim as the boat landing beyond, to which were tethered half a dozen outboards. A few hundred yards from shore, Loon Lake lost itself in cottony mists.

The man who answered Mallory's knock was slight and gray, with a high forehead, ascetic nose, thinner lips. His gray eyes twinkled with amusement at Mallory's bespattered appearance.

"Alvin Bushey?"

The slight, gray man nodded and pushed the door wider. "Come in," he said. "I saw you coming down the path. If you just walked out from the highway, I imagine you've had a rather unpleasant trip."

Mallory kicked mud from his shoes at a scraper beside the door, stepped through a rough-finished porch lined with motors and fishing tackle and into a large comfortable room. Pelts carpeted the floor, the heads of two six-point bucks stared moodily from above an unlit fireplace, and there was plenty of leather upholstery scattered about.

Mallory sank into an easy chair beside an unglazed bookcase bulging with the well-thumbed works of Shakespeare, Thoreau, Emerson and De Quincey.

"Damned unpleasant," he said grimly. "The last half mile my own voice followed me—literally."

Bushey's amusement deepened. "You've met Egbert," he said fondly.

Mallory admitted that.

Bushey shook his head. He wore a brown pigskin jacket over gray breeches and puttees, and Mallory noticed that he had on a

gray shirt and tie beneath the jacket's neck. "My son was born with a remarkable gift," he smiled. "But I'm afraid he would rather frighten strangers with it than put it to any worthwhile use. . . We once had a couple of fishing guests who offered him a fine job doing impersonations over the radio. But Egbert turned them down. He can't bear the thought of leaving the lake. . ."

Mallory thought about this. He'd heard about people with Egbert's remarkable gift—even met a couple, in theatre dressing rooms, people born with an uncanny knack of mimicry, so that they could imitate perfectly every tone, every inflection, of almost any sounds they heard. They were sort of a rare natural phenomena, like those born with true photographic memories.

"Maybe the girl has something to do with his sticking around," he suggested.

Bushey's gray eyes hardened. He sighed heavily. "Rosabelle," he said. "Indian Bob, her father, has a shack across the cove. Helps Egbert and me during the busy season. She's been singing in a nightclub in St. Paul—came home for a vacation two weeks ago and decided to stay. Damn it, sometimes I wish she weren't quite so much like Egbert. . ."

Mallory nodded speculatively. His eyes bored into Bushey's.

"I'm looking for Joey Summers," he said suddenly. "He came here to talk to you about some jewelry eight days ago. He never got back."

The gray eyes widened, then clouded. Alvin Bushey shook his head despairingly. "Then Egbert was right," he mused. "I was a fool to give that man those things. Egbert said he'd simply run for the border with them, that we'd never see the reward he promised. Canada's little more than a day's drive from here, you know."

Mallory was beginning to get mad. He made a rude sound with his lips. "Joey didn't skip," he said flatly. "If he meant to do that, he'd never have phoned in. You admit you gave the stuff to him, then?"

Bushey's eyes got big and bewildered. "Why, of course! I'd have given them to the girl herself if I'd been here the next morning when she called. But she talked to Egbert, and he didn't know anything. I didn't find the jewels myself until the day following. . ."

Mallory didn't say anything. Bushey waited a moment, then went on with his story defensively.

"Damn it, she wouldn't leave any name or address, you know! I intended to turn them over to the sheriff the next time I was in Dalton. I had no idea of their real value, of course. . . I wonder she didn't go to the sheriff herself!" He began to eye Mallory suspiciously.

MALLORY lit a cigarette. He knew why Deborah Lysander hadn't gone to the law. That would have meant publicity, and she'd been drunk the night she and three more of the Gold Coast crowd, house-guesting at a private lodge ten miles beyond, had stopped by and rented Bushey's big outboard. Half a mile out they'd decided to go for a swim over the side, and she'd stashed her jewels in a breaker in the bow. The water hadn't sobered her much, and she'd forgotten about them till she woke up back at the lodge the next morning.

Panic-stricken at the thought of publicity or blackmail, she'd made a foolishly half-hearted attempt to recover them herself, and then had high-tailed to Chicago to call in Hardy Investigations.

"Summers got here Friday morning. You turn the stuff over right away?"

Bushey nodded.

"Then why the hell did he hang around till Saturday night before calling in?" The words spattered through the stillness like rifle shots.

Bushey blinked. The gray eyes swelled and his jaw went slack. "B-but that's absurd, man!" he protested. "He stayed around here, drinking from a pocket flash and talking to Egbert and Rosabelle, till about 6:30. Then he said he had to catch the 7:15 bus for Minneapolis, and walked off up the path. That was the last we heard of him."

Mallory considered this. He knew the story would be hard to disprove if Egbert and Rosabelle backed it up. And Bushey would not have told it unless he knew they would.

"What did you all do while Summers was walking back to the highway?" he asked.

"I stayed right here. Rosabelle asked Egbert over for dinner and they left together."

Mallory arose and stretched. "Guess I'm about washed up around here, then," he said. "Unless I can find out what Joey did during the twenty-four hours between the time he left here and the time he made that phone call. You got a phone I can use?"

Bushey shook his head. "Mother McGruder has the nearest telephone."

Mallory nodded. "Looks like I'm stuck then, till the 7:15 bus for Minneapolis," he said dreamily. "And long as I'm here, I might as well get in some fishing. Got a spade I can borrow?"

The gray eyes regarded him oddly. "Why?" "Gonna dig me some bait."

The eyes twinkled a little. "You don't know much about lake fishing, do you, Mister?" Bushey smiled. "When we want live bait around here, we use minnows."

"Minnows?" Mallory said. "Never took much stock in 'em. I'm going digging for worm bait."

**T**HIRTY minutes later he found it. The worm-bait that was all that was left of Joey Summers. The bait Mallory meant to use to catch a killer. . . There might have been better ways, but he was impatient.

He had left Alvin Bushey behind at the cabin, and he had seen nothing of Egbert or the girl Rosabelle as he plodded back down the path. But he expected to see one of the three now—soon. He stood the spade in the pile of loose dirt beside the grave and waited.

The mud had packed down hard about the fully-clothed body, and Mallory scraped away only enough of it to see that the back of the skull had been battered in, and make positive identification.

Then he pulled up the mud-covered briefcase lying across the corpse's stomach. There was no use worrying about fingerprints now, at least on the outside. He snapped it open.

Even in the dull, grim light of the cemetery, there were enough diamonds on the brooch inside to throw shafts of fire in his eyes. He was still staring at it, part of his mind racing wildly, when that part which was still detached and alert picked up the first signals of what he had been awaiting.

Afterwards, he could never say exactly what it was. Maybe the swish of a damp branch, the squish of a soggy evergreen cone. But it made him straighten and whirl, and for a split second he saw the girl's face staring at him from behind a tree at the clearing's edge.

He dropped the briefcase. The gun was in his hand almost before she had disappeared.

"Hold it!" he lashed. "I know how to use this thing!"

His answer was the soft scuffing thud of feet racing over needle-carpeted mud. Then a cry, a sharp little gasp of anguish, and a faintly louder thud. He followed the sounds, sprinting forward, the gun surprisingly level at his hip.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Gruesome McGruder

**H**E FOUND her crumpled in the underbrush. A half-hidden vine had thrown her and she moaned softly, clutching her left

ankle. The emerald ring was gone from her finger.

"All right," he snapped. "We may as well have it now. Start talking—and fast! Where'd you get it?"

Her green eyes licked at him like a cat's, appraising him.

"G-get what?"

"You know what. The ring."

"I—found it."

He had never heard her speak before. Her voice was slow and smoky, even through the pain.

"Oh, sure," he said. "You think that'll stand up in court? Come on, sister. "We're gonna see the sheriff."

"Oh, no! I can't walk! My ankle—"

He reached over and prodded her with the gun. "All right, crawl, then. But get moving."

She turned on the tears then. "W-wait, copper. . . I'll tell you the truth! He gave it to me. That—that Joey Summers. For helping him get away. He came back to my Dad's shack that night, and offered me the ring if I'd row him across the lake so he could catch the Port Arthur train at Dalton—and get out of the country.

"He said he was gonna powder with the rest of the stuff, but he'd give me the ring if I'd help throw you off the trail and keep my mouth shut. Honest, copper! I'll give it back—"

He put the gun in his pocket and picked her up, roughly. "Babes like you just won't learn, will they?" he grunted. "You don't know you're in trouble, even when you see it. What do you think I dug up back there?"

"Gosh, I don't know, copper. Honest! I followed when I saw you leave Bushey's with the spade. But I sneaked up slow. I just got there when you caught me. I didn't see a thing."

Mallory put her down at the grave's edge. He pointed. "All right," he said. "Now you know. That's Joey Summers, kid. . . Still stick to your story?"

The green eyes turned up until they were almost all white. Her mouth came open, slow motion, like a sleeping goldfish's. He clapped a hand over it.

"Oh no you don't," he said. "You don't

yell. Not if you're smart. Not if you aren't the real murderer. He'll probably be here soon enough, without that."

The corded lines of her face gradually relaxed. She seemed to fall apart, then gather herself together again. He took his hand from her mouth.

"Listen," he said. "I don't have to tell you how you rate, as things stand now. I've got to go to Mother McGruder's and call the sheriff. You'd be going along for company, except for that bum ankle. If you're smart, you'll be right here when I get back, though. You won't try to crawl away, and you won't try to tell anybody about this hole. Understand?"

She began to tremble again. "D-don't leave me here, Copper!" she pleaded. "Oh God, don't do that! You said the real murderer might come—"

"He won't unless he finds out I've dug up the corpse," he said. "And I won't tell him."

She began to whimper. He looked away for a moment, then glanced back reluctantly. He saw that her ankle was already beginning to swell. His voice was gruff.

"Okay," he said. "I'll leave you my gun. I'll leave it on a headstone at the other edge of the path, as I go. You can crawl over and get it. It won't take you long. A minute or two. But it'll give me time to get out of range through these trees, in case you aren't leveling."

He picked up the mud-layered briefcase then and walked off, leaving her crouched there in the dirt with the upended spade, the hole and the body.

**WHOEVER** named Loon Lake had made a mistake, Mallory thought bitterly as he trudged along the muddy ruts toward Mother McGruder's Bar and Grill. The "Loon" should have had a final "y" on it. He tallied his suspects:

A penny-ante bartender who couldn't remember her customers.

A kid who turned down a ready-made stage career to be a fishing guide.

A nightclub singer who hated cities.

An obviously cultured recluse who forsook the world to run a two-by-four camp in the wilderness.

And one of them was a thieving murderer who buried his—or her—victim with \$19,000 worth of loot still on the body! . . .

Mother McGruder still shared the bar with the dead mosquito, when Mallory walked in half an hour later.

"Hello, Copper," she sneered, her hairy upper lip curling. "Get your man?"

Mallory eyed her calculatingly. "Surprised?" he asked. "Surprised that I did?"

Mother McGruder was. Her greenish face

turned even greener, and the watery eyes were suddenly hot and dry. Then the eyes narrowed, and the face came back to life again.

"Nuts," she said. "That guy's long gone, Copper. He's in Canada by this time."

Mallory let the corners of his mouth turn up. "He's long gone, all right," he said. "But what makes you think he was interested in Canada? You don't even remember him—or have you changed your mind about that?"

Mother McGruder thought it over. "So what if I do remember him, now you mention it?" she said. "Where does that put me, one way or another?"

Mallory thought she sounded a little worried. "Right behind the eight-ball!" he lashed. "Joey Summers turned up in a very appropriate place. A cemetery. . . ."

"Look, short, fat and killerish," he mimicked. "You think I don't see how easy it would be for you to knock him off after he made that phone call? To steal the stuff, then cart him out to that old cemetery and bury him? You think the sheriff won't see it? Or a jury? Maybe you better tell me about it."

"All right," she said sullenly. "I remember him. But I don't know nothin' about no murder. He come back later that night and told me he'd decided to skip. To Canada. He told me if anybody asked for him later, I wasn't to remember him. That's all. I swear it. That's all I know about him, Copper—"

Mallory considered. The speech sounded a little too rehearsed, too familiar. Of course, that could mean it was the truth. Or—

He grinned wolfishly. "Oh," he said. "Just like that. He told you to lie for him, so you did. "You'd only met him twice, but already you loved him enough to cover for him. Fatty, that stinks!"

The watery eyes faltered, began to shift. "All right," she mumbled. "Mebbe he gimme sump'n to keep my mouth shut. Mebbe he promised to send me more, after he got settled and had a chance to fence the stuff. He had plenty with him—"

Mallory watched her paw a flat, wide-mouthed fifth of rum from beneath the bar. He followed as she waddled shakily through the swinging doors into the kitchen, began to empty the bottle into a stew pan. There was a little clunk as something shiny and solid dropped from the bottle's mouth. He fished Deborah Lysander's diamond ring out of the cinnamon-colored liquor.

He held it to the light a moment, lost in thought. Then he dropped it into the briefcase beside the brooch.

"Okay, Fatty," he said. "I'm going to call the sheriff now. You stay with me. Right close. I like your company. Afterwards, we're going to take a little ride, you and I. You must have some kind of bus around here."



He dropped a hand into his topcoat pocket, then remembered he'd left the little automatic with Rosabelle. But he allowed the hand to remain there, anyway. It seemed to do the job.

"The Dodge is out back," Mother McGruder said morosely. "But I ain't got much gas . . ."

"You've got enough to get where you're going," Mallory told her. "To the cemetery."

MALLORY sat beside her, Summers' briefcase touching the back of his neck, while Mother McGruder cursed and sweated and fought the wheel, and the Dodge groaned and skidded from ditch to ditch, making about ten miles an hour in second over the wet, muddy road.

The terns still screamed and the doves still mourned and the mist still dripped from the trees beside the road. But Mallory felt better about all that now.

They were within a hundred feet of the cemetery when the shooting started. The first shot puffed from the trees to the right, pulverizing the ancient windshield, and Mallory cursed the momentary weakness which had made him leave his automatic with Rosabelle. That gun sounded much too familiar. He dove for the cavity beneath the dashboard—and waited.

Mother McGruder wasn't so lucky. Pinned behind the huge old steering wheel, she made a perfect target. Mallory heard the second shot and felt the edge of the car seat give against his shoulders as she jerked, quaked a moment, then slumped forward, quite dead.

Crouched at her knees, quivering with rage, he reached out and yanked the emergency brake. The Dodge bogged down in a chuck-hole, and lurched to a stop.

Mother McGruder stared down at him accusingly from between the spokes of the wheel, her eyes glassy.

Normally Mallory was a cautious man. But he also had an unpredictable temper, and a disturbing sense of responsibility.

He heard the footsteps scuffing through the underbrush, going away, and he jerked open the creaking car door and plummeted after them. He was half way to the path's entrance when the third shot rang out.

For the second time that day, he sprawled face-first in the mud. He was still lying that way, inert, when the scream ripped out from somewhere beyond the fringe of evergreens screening the cemetery.

He heard the frantic voice cry, "No! . . . No! . . ." And he listened while the second scream mounted in terror, hung there somewhere above high C, then dwindled into a soft, ugly gurgling.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Murder Bids One Spade

THE tableau posed at the edge of Joey Summers' grave was not pretty.

Egbert had Rosabelle by the throat, and Mallory saw that he had been wrong about the kid's big body being soft. Rosabelle's face was a bloated, splotchy purple, her green eyes bulged vacantly and the end of her small pink tongue lolled swollenly between blood-flecked teeth.

The boy's denim shirt was stained a dirty brown below the right ribs, and the stain was still spreading. Mallory's little gun glinted from the mud a few feet to one side.

Mallory wanted to yell, but he couldn't find his voice. As he watched, the lovers seemed to sway a little, gently, like maples in a soft breeze. Then Egbert's hands came away stiffly and the girl's body folded slowly to the wet loam, beside the spade still standing where Mallory had planted it at the grave's edge.

Egbert shook himself like a great dog. "I killed her. . ." he sighed. "I killed my Rosabelle. . ." He sat down in the mud between the corpses and began to snivel brokenly.

Mallory stepped forward just as Alvin Bushey's gray and brown clad figure burst from the path at the other edge of the clearing. Egbert's eyes settled on his father's stricken face and he shivered.

"She made me do it, Pop," he sobbed. "She made me. . . I was crazy for her. . ."

"Made you do what?" Mallory snapped.

Egbert's lopsided face swung around dully. He put a hand to his shirt and the hand came away sticky. He buried it in the dirty brown hair above his ears.

"M-made me help her bury th-that detective," he moaned. "We follered him when he left th' house, and she tried to get me to kill him. She wanted the jewels. . . An' when I wouldn't, she grabbed up a rock and run down the path and d-did it herself. . . He was drunk I don't think he hardly knew what hit him. . ."

He broke off, face twitching.

"She m-made me help drag him back in the bushes. . . And that night she had me git Pop's spade and come down here with her and b-bury him. . ."

Alvin Bushey's face was a gray and frozen mask. He looked down at the girl's body and the left side of his mouth dragged down as though unseen fingers tugged it. But his voice was strangely gentle when he spoke:

"Go on, boy. . . I want Mr. Mallory to hear all of this."

Egbert's queer blue eyes turned up plaintively. "We b-buried the briefcase with the brooch in it on top of him. . . She said it would be safe there till th-the heat blew off and

she could dig it up and f-fence it. . . Sh-she said she knew somebody in St. Paul who'd do it for her. . ."

Mallory's eyes darkened. "What about the rings?" he asked.

"She k-kept 'em out. She was crazy about the g-green one. She said she was a knock-out in it. . . I told her it wasn't safe, but she said she'd only wear it when nobody b-but me was around. Later she was gonna have the stone took out and made into a p-pin."

"And the diamond?"

"Sh-she give that to me to g-give to M-Mother McGruder. She had me go down there th' next night and make that phone call to your office, imitatin' the d-detective's voice. . . Sh-she said th 'call would prove he was alive a whole day after he l-left here, if anybody got suspicious later. And she had me give th' ring to Mother McGruder to keep her quiet. . ."

"If you loved her enough to do all that for her, how come you just knocked her off?" Mallory said brutally.

The lopsided face contorted and the light blue eyes filmed with anguish. "Oh, Lord," Egbert moaned. "I didn't mean to! So help me! But I told her to drop the gun, and sh-she shot me, and ever'thing went red. I d-didn't snap out of it till she was already dead. I didn't know what I was doin' . . ."

"She run away after we met you on the path, sayin' she had to hide the ring. She told me to wait for her back in the trees. But she didn't come back and I got worried and begun to move around, huntin' for her.

"I was down here by the cemetery, in that little clump o' bushes over there, when I heard them two shots down by the road and saw her hobblin' back up the path. I jumped out of the bushes and tried to grab the gun and she shot me. . . Oh, God. . ."

**M**ALLORY'S lips pursed and his dark eyes widened deceptively. "Well whaddayuh know!" he said. "So that's how it was."

Alvin Bushey straightened and turned to stare at him, and squatting there in the mud between the corpses, Egbert seemed to stop trembling for a moment.

"You know what I'd have said?" Mallory asked them. "You know what I'd have said, if I hadn't actually heard those screams and seen the kid strangling the girl?"

"I'd have said Egbert did it all by himself. I'd have said Rosabelle was a lady who had her price, and that Egbert thought he saw a way to pay that price when he learned from Summers how much those jewels were really worth, that he found some excuse to send Rosabelle home alone that evening, and then cut through the woods and killed Joey, that he sneaked back later and buried him, all by himself.

"I'd have said that Egbert gave the green ring to Rosabelle later, explaining that Summers had given it to him in return for help in skipping the country, that he dreamed up the phone call angle himself, and gave the diamond to Mother McGruder with the same explanation.

"And I'd have said that even after they found Joey Summers was murdered, both women were still willing to shield Egbert. For this reason: They thought if they kept quiet nobody could prove he did it. And in return for keeping quiet, each figured she could wangle the diamond brooch out of him later. . ."

"You see neither of them had any idea Egbert had left the brooch in what he thought was the safest place in the world—the briefcase buried with Summers' body. They didn't know I'd already found it. Only Egbert knew that!"

He broke off, lips quirking sardonically.

"Yep," he went on. "That's what I'd have said. . . In fact, I'm not so sure I won't say it anyway. When the sheriff gets here, I'm not so sure I won't tell him that Egbert also murdered Mother McGruder!"

Egbert whimpered toward his father and the elder Bushey stepped forward indignantly.

"But that's absurd, man! You said—"

Mallory cut him off. "When I tell him about it, I think the sheriff'll find that Rosabelle never made any footprints down to the road and back. And the coroner, or M.E.—whatever you call the stiff expert up here—will prove that Rosabelle died before Mother McGruder."

"The way I see it, Egbert was already hiding in those bushes when I carried Rosabelle back here. After I left, he jumped out and strangled her before she could get to my gun.

"Then he took the gun and came down to the roadside to watch for my return, so he could time his final act to make sure I got in on just the right part. And when he saw Mother McGruder with me, he also saw a swell chance to get rid of the only remaining witness against him, and blame that on Rosabelle, too. Of course, I could be wrong. The sheriff'll have to decide that."

Alvin Bushey stiffened with awe and horror. He seemed to age ten years in the next ten seconds. "Then you—you mean? My God! . . ."

Mallory nodded ironically. "That's just what I mean," he said. "Egbert waited till the car was almost here, ambushed Mother McGruder, then ran back and picked up Rosabelle's corpse. He pressed the automatic against her palm so it would show cordite later, winged himself in the side, then dropped the gun and imitated her screams while he again choked her already lifeless body—just for my benefit. . ."

"It was pretty effective. He could claim self-defense, and I myself would be his witness. He might get a light rap as accessory in the Summers murder, but he knew it wouldn't go too hard with him after a clever defense attorney got through telling the jury how the evil nightclub charmer duped this poor, stupid, defenseless country lad."

**A**LVIN BUSHEY tottered a little as at a blow on the face. But Egbert had stopped trembling. The queer, light eyes seemed to be shrouded with ice as they stared into Mallory's. Mallory slowly shook his head.

"I'm sorry, Pop," he said softly. "I saw how you felt about Rosabelle this morning, when I told you about finding her on the path with Egbert. You hated her. You've been afraid of something like this, almost since the boy was born, I think.

"You knew he'd get into trouble if he spent too much time around people. There was something animal about him—about his eyes, the shape of his head, his queer shuffling gait. Even about that odd, clever knack of his for imitation.

"Oh he was smart enough. I don't mean that. But you knew he was one of those rare people who can never learn right from wrong.

"You brought him up here to protect him. You thought he might be safe here in the wilderness, away from the world's temptations. But when Indian Bob's girl Rosabelle came along, and learned about the jewels you had found, I think you must have known it was the beginning of the end. . ."

His eyes dropped back to Egbert—too late.

The boy had snaked out a hand while Mallory was busy with the old man. He held Mallory's little automatic now, centered on its owner's belt buckle. And the gun didn't waver.

"This isn't the end, Copper," Egbert said sibilantly. "It isn't the end of anything—except you." The pale opaque eyes regarded him like some curious wriggling thing beneath a microscope. Mallory decided that maybe Egbert was right. He tensed himself for the fiery impact of the lead.

Then he saw Alvin Bushey behind Egbert, step suddenly to one side. The spade standing beside Joey Summers' grave left the mud with a soft sucking sound, arced skyward. It hung there a moment, while somewhere far away the terns called and the doves mourned.

Then it swished down.

Egbert's skull fell apart on each side of the blade, like earth turning before a plow. The gun dropped from suddenly flacid fingers.

And Alvin Bushey stood behind his broken son, bent and awkward and gray with the grayness of death, his hands still clutching the spade handle.

Mallory shook uncontrollably. His mouth opened, but there were no words to say. He thought of the things he loved and now would live to see again. He thought of the bright lights and the loud traffic and the surging crowds of Chicago, and a great wave of thankfulness engulfed him.

Alvin Bushey stirred. His voice was dry and hollow, sere as pine cones after a long drouth. "He—he never would have lived, anyway," he said. "Shut up behind bars. . . in a little cell. . . away from the lake. . ."

**THE END**