

ONE STEP AHEAD

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We printed 600,000 copies of our first issue, and we boosted the printing to 800,000 for our second issue, but there remained a great many newsdealers who ran out and who were forced to disappoint their customers.

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CONTENTS

SERIAL

EVERYBODY'S WATCHING ME — Part IV
By Mickey Spillane Page 120

NOVELETTES

ONE LITTLE BULLET *by Henry Kane* Page 1
A Peter Chambers story

THE BLUE SWEETHEART *by David Goodis* Page 102

THE G-NOTES *by Robert Patrick Wilmot* Page 65

SHORT STORIES

FAN CLUB *by Richard Ellington* Page 48
A Steve Drake story

MUGGER MURDER *by Richard Deming* Page 85

KID KILL *by Evan Hunter* Page 93

BE MY GUEST *by Robert Turner* Page 39

BIG TALK *by Kris Neville* Page 31

SHAKEDOWN *by Roy Carroll* Page 57

SPECIAL FEATURE

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT? *by Shepherd Kole* Page 100

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Fan Club

BY RICHARD ELLINGTON

Evelyn had the bad habit of flitting from one man to another. And sometimes bad habits can prove pretty fatal.

THE home-town drink in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, is rum. I was having a slightly diluted glass of it at the bar in the Bamboo Room, gazing out across the shimmering sunlight of the Square at the old fort and reflecting on the changes three years had brought to the Virgin Islands in general and to St. Thomas in particular.

A lot of things hadn't been here three years ago — including the Bamboo Room and the lush young blonde on the bar stool next to mine.

Bars like the Bamboo Room are a dime a dozen, but the blonde was something else again. I'd taken a good fast look at her when she first came in, and a couple of even faster ones in the bar mirror, and then I'd tried to get interested in the old fort again. No use looking at candy if you haven't got the price.

She said, "You're not very sociable, Mr. Drake."

She couldn't have surprised me more if she'd hit me on the head with a rum bottle. I turned around to face her, and cocked an eyebrow to indicate she had the advantage.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I —"

She laughed, and suddenly all the sunshine was not out in the Square. "That's all right. I was just teasing. I saw you checking in at the West Indian, and I asked Charley Boxer who you were." She had a soft, throaty voice that smiled right along with her gray-blue eyes. "You don't look much like a private detective, do you?"

"Don't I?" I said, and realized I was gaping at her like an idiot.

Most times I can do more about a pitch from a pretty girl than gawk at her. But not now. This girl was the end. I didn't know what the minimum requirement for street clothing was in St. Thomas, but she was wearing it. She had a body that would have looked good in anything, and in skimpy blue halter and shorts it looked almost too good to be true. And her hair wasn't just yellow, I noticed; it was a pure yellow, like rich warm butter.

"Charley said you were down here for a vacation," she said.

I nodded, and got my eyes back in my head. "Couple weeks. Are you a friend of Charley Boxer's, Miss . . . ?"

"Lanier. Evelyn Lanier. Yes, you might say I'm a friend of Charley's." I got the impression that the thought amused her.

For some reason, I felt ill at ease. It wasn't just her beauty, or the fact that I couldn't understand why I should suddenly be so tongue-tied when a pretty girl made a pitch at me. It was something about the atmosphere in the bar. And then it came to me that the blonde and I were the only ones talking. Except for a young kid in a crew haircut sitting with a brunette girl at one of the tables, and a lanky, redheaded guy at the far end of the bar, we'd had the place to ourselves.

It was funny because, before Evelyn had come in, the young kid in

the crew cut and his girl had been having a pretty good argument about something, and the redheaded guy had been talking the ear off the bartender.

I glanced toward the kid and his girl, and then I did a double take. Both of them were glaring at us. The kid's eyes shuttled between the two of us, but his girl friend was concentrating entirely on the blonde. Neither of them could have been more than nineteen or twenty.

I held the kid's eyes a moment, but they didn't even blink. I shrugged and turned back to Evelyn. "Those two over at the table — are they friends of yours?"

She nodded. "Certainly. Just like Charley Boxer." She lowered her voice almost to a whisper. "And if you'll look up at the far end of the bar, you'll see another. I'm a very popular girl."

I lifted my drink and glanced over the rim of it at the redheaded guy. I've seen some hard looks in my time, and I know kill-fever in a man's eyes when I see it. I was looking straight at it.

The air in the Bamboo Room was so charged with hate that I began to think about the .38 clipped beneath my left shoulder.

"Did you say friends of yours?" I asked.

"I have lots of friends. And here comes one." Her smile was just as bright as ever. "Charley Boxer."

I looked past the redheaded man toward the street door, and sud-

denly I remembered that Charley had said he might meet me here for a drink. I'd been surprised at the change three years had made in Charley, and the change struck me again as he came toward the bar.

Three years ago Charley had been tall and blond and muscular, as happy-go-lucky as they come. Now he was still blond, but his shoulders seemed to have narrowed and settled into a defeated slump. He'd grown thin and hollow-cheeked. There was something different about his eyes, too — something I couldn't define.

"Hello, Charley," Evelyn said gaily.

Charley nodded at her, without smiling, and said nothing.

I grinned. "How about a drink, boy?"

He shook his head. "Not here," he said, his eyes still on Evelyn. "How about next door?"

I shrugged. "Whatever you say." I didn't know what the hell was going on in the Bamboo Room, but it was putting me in a pretty sour mood for a guy just starting a vacation. I put a bill on the bar and followed Charley out to the street.

"Come on over to the hotel," Charley said. "I'll give you a drink of rum that'll make that other stuff taste like turpentine."

We turned in the direction of the West Indian, and I said, "Give."

"What do you mean?"

"That girl back there. Evelyn. The way people react to her, you'd think she was a cobra. You can get

a hard look just by sitting next to her.

Charley mopped the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand. "You just happened to meet her when her fan club was around."

"Meaning?"

"She's a girl who just naturally causes trouble. A guy takes one look at her, and straightway he forgets about everything else."

There was something about the way he said it. I looked at him, "you too, Charley?"

We'd walked another half dozen steps before he answered. Then, "Yeah . . . me, too."

"And the redheaded guy at the end of the bar?"

Charley nodded. "He's an artist. He came here for a couple weeks, to paint — and that was four months ago. Evelyn played with him a while."

We turned the corner, and I said, "Don't tell me that kid with the joe college haircut . . ."

"Yeah. He got it the worst of all. He and that little girl you saw him with were engaged — before Evelyn Lanier showed up. Nice kid, too, and you'd never find a nicer girl than the one you saw him with. Damn shame."

"Split them up, eh?"

"Yeah. Everybody thought Danny Jenkins and Lois were a sure bet to get married. But then along came Evelyn — and that was that. Danny never even knew what hit him."

"But Lois took him back, anyhow?"

"She'd *like* to. When Evelyn gave Danny the bounce, Lois was right there to catch him. She's crazy about Danny. They're both rich kids, and neither one of them ever wanted anything they didn't get."

We turned in at the West Indian and walked across the lobby to the elevator. We didn't say anything in the car on the way up to the fourth floor. I couldn't know what Charley was thinking about, but I was ready to bet it was about Evelyn Lanier, the same as I was. I hadn't talked to her long, but it had been long enough to believe that she'd be a hard girl to forget.

When we were settled in Charley's room with a pair of tall, cold drinks, Charley said, "It's funny, Mr. Drake. When I got the job as assistant manager here at the hotel, I sort of settled down. Maybe I was just getting old, but I began thinking about a wife and kids. I'd done enough helling around, and when Evelyn moved in here I guess I was just prime for what happened. Anyhow, I got it bad. She made the world go round for me, and for a couple months everything was great." He took a sip of his drink, and I noticed his eyes had narrowed a little.

"And then?" I asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Then Red Cannon — that's the guy at the bar I was telling you about — came here from Miami. All at once he's number one boy. Then she meets Danny Jenkins, and Red gets the big good-bye." He smiled thinly. "And

now even Danny's joined the club."

I stared at my drink. "That Red Cannon — she must have really messed him up. He gave us one hell of a look."

Charley smiled thinly. "She did mess him up, believe me. He almost flipped. Red's not too well, you see — got all shot up in the service — head wound. Seems it left him deaf for about two years, and even after he got okay again his nerves were pretty well shot. He had a pension, so he took it easy. He isn't much of an artist, I guess, but he seemed happy enough." He laughed dryly. "Until he fell for Evelyn, that is."

"Who's number one man now, Charley?"

"You want to apply for the job?"

"Nope. Just curious."

"So far as I know, she's playing the field. She came down here originally to get a divorce, and this morning her settlement came through. Ten grand. I was passing her room and she called me in to tell me about it. I guess she just wanted to gloat, or something, but anyhow she showed me the money." His voice was edged with bitterness now, I noticed. "She always was one to show everything she had. Maybe she got a bang out of needling me with the fact that she had money — when she knows I don't — and reminding me that she's going back to the States tonight."

I drained my glass and studied him. He wasn't kidding me. He was carrying a torch for her as big as a house.

"Funny about women like her," he said, almost as if he were talking to himself. "They like to rub it in. I told her she'd better put that ten grand in the hotel safe until she left, but she just laughed at me. She kept fanning it out before my face and asking me to look at it. 'Ten thousand dollars,' she'd say. 'I just got my check cashed. Couldn't we have a wonderful time on ten thousand dollars, Charley?' And then she'd laugh and riffle through the money again."

It was getting embarrassing. I hated to see an old friend as troubled as Charley obviously was, but there was nothing I could do for him. The only thing that would help Charley was time, and a lot of it.

I got up and moved to the door. "I'll see you later on, Charley," I told him. "Right now I'm going to get some shut-eye."

He nodded. "See you later."

I lay down on the bed in my room without bothering to take off my slacks and sport shirt. I meant only to rest a while and then go out to dinner. But I must have really been dead for sleep, because the next thing I knew, there was a loud knocking at my door and Charley's voice was calling my name.

I opened the door to let him in, but he shook his head and motioned for me to follow him. I went along the corridor behind him and he opened the door of the room next to mine and said, "In there."

I went in and Charley came in quickly behind me and shut the door.

She was curled up on the bed exactly as if she had lain down to take a nap. She was still wearing the blue halter and shorts and her face was still very beautiful. But now only the hair near her forehead was that pure butter yellow. The rest of it was red. On the floor beside the bed was a heavy bronze book-end, the mate to the one on the shelf at the head of her bed, and along one edge of the book-end there was a thick dark smudge with a few yellow hairs adhering to it.

Behind me, Charley Boxer's voice was toneless, almost inaudible. "I got to wondering why she didn't check out," he said. "I called her room, and when she didn't answer I came up."

I turned and looked at him. "You said she wasn't going to check out until tonight," I said slowly. I hated to think what I was thinking, but there was no way around it.

His eyes looked sick. "It *is* night," he said. "My God, it's damn near midnight!"

I must have been half asleep, because until that instant I hadn't realized that the large rectangle of the window was black and all the lights in the room were on. I glanced at my watch. It was eleven-forty.

Charley shook his head slowly. "I didn't kill her. I swear I didn't."

I studied him a long moment. "Have you called the police?"

He moistened his lips. "No."

"Why not?"

"Because they'll think the same thing you did. And they'll hear about my threatening her and —"

"Threatening her? When?"

"A couple of days ago. I lost my head, I guess. I thought maybe there was still some chance for me, and when I happened to meet her alone in the Bamboo Room I started talking about it." He ran his hand down across his sweat-sheened face and his whole body seemed to slump. "She laughed at me. Right in front of everybody. She laughed at me — and then I — I guess I threatened to kill her. I don't know just what I said. I was half crazy."

I walked over to the window and drew the blind, and then I made a quick circuit of the room. I didn't find anything, and I hadn't expected to find anything. I walked back to Charley.

"This is murder, Charley," I said. "I'm a private detective, not a homicide cop. You'll have to call the police."

"No!"

"Damn it, Charley! Get yourself together. Don't you realize that the longer you wait, the worse it's going to be?"

He reached out and caught my arms just above the elbows. His eyes were pleading with me. "I didn't do it," he said. "It was just like I told you it was. But nobody's going to believe me. Nobody!"

"But, Charley — what can I do?"

His voice sounded choked, as if he were having difficulty getting his breath. "You've got to find out who *did* do it," he said. "They won't believe I came up here for the reason I did. Once the police get in on this, I'm as good as convicted."

I tried to read his face. I could see the fear and the sickness there — but I couldn't see inside his brain. I couldn't know whether he was telling the truth.

"A little while longer won't make any difference," he said. "Just an hour, Steve. Just an hour."

I wanted to say no. Common sense told me to say no. But common sense wasn't strong enough. Not when there was a chance I might help one of the best friends I ever had — a guy who, three years before, had done everything he could to help me solve one of my toughest cases.

I pushed Charley down in a chair, facing away from the bed, and started pacing the floor.

"If you called her, you must have been at the desk," I said.

He nodded.

"Did you see anybody come in or out who might have had a reason to kill her?"

He thought a moment. "No."

"How about the people you were telling me about? Red Cannon, and Danny Jenkins, and Danny's girl — what's her name?"

"Lois. But she couldn't have done it."

"Like hell," I said. "Girls her age

have done worse than this. And she was crazy jealous over Danny, wasn't she?"

"Yes, but —"

"All right. So she could have. Does she or any of the others live here in the hotel?"

"Only Red Cannon."

"Do you think she told anybody else about the money? About the divorce settlement, I mean?"

He shook his head. "I think she just saw a chance to bait me, and took it. I don't think she'd be foolish enough to broadcast it."

"Probably not," I said. "And that means she must have been killed because somebody hated her. God knows there were enough of them. Red and Danny, and Lois . . ."

"Yeah," Charley said. "And me."

"And you, Charley. I'm doing this out of friendship, but I'm not blinding myself. You understand?"

He nodded.

"All right, then. Let's get the hell out of here."

I left him in his room and took the elevator down to the lobby.

I was within half a block of the Bamboo Room when I made out the tall, rangy form of Red Cannon coming toward me. The artist paused a moment to drop a letter in a mail box, and then came on again, and now I noticed that he was a little drunk. He glanced at me as we passed, but he said nothing and the sound of his steps never wavered.

The Bamboo Room was crowded when I stepped inside. I made a com-

plete check of the place, but there was no Danny Jenkins and no Lois. I went to the bar and ordered beer. When it came, I motioned the bartender close to me. He was not the same one who had been on duty during the afternoon when I had met Evelyn Lanier.

"You know Danny Jenkins, don't you?" I asked.

He nodded. "Sure."

"Have they been in here tonight?"

"Yeah. You just missed them. They ain't been gone more than fifteen minutes."

"How long were they here?"

"They were here when I came on duty. That was at six." He looked at me. "Why?"

"Did they leave, or did either one of them leave, say for fifteen or twenty minutes, and then come back?"

He shook his head. "Not that I saw. What's this all about?"

It had been a wild try, but that's all I had: wild tries. Wild tries, and an hour to do what I could for Charley Boxer.

"Sorry to bother you, friend," I said. "Thanks."

"Listen!" he said. "What the hell is up?"

But I wasn't interested in his questions.

I started back toward the West Indian Hotel. And all at once it hit me. I knew damn well who had killed Evelyn Lanier.

I asked the clerk at the desk for Mr. Cannon's room number, but I

didn't wait for the elevator. I had to knock for fully half a minute before the door opened.

"I'd like to talk to you, Mr. Cannon," I told him.

"Who are you?"

"My name's Drake."

"What the hell do you want?"

"Let's not be nasty," I said. "Do you invite me in, or do I just simply come in?"

He thought about that a moment, and I pushed him in.

He closed the door slowly and I could see those hot lights coming into his eyes, the same ones I'd seen in the bar. He was wearing a sport coat and slacks, and there was no bulge beneath his arm or on his hip. I had expected him to be heeled.

"All right," he said softly. "This better be good. If it isn't, I'm going to have some fun with your face."

"It's good," I said. "Real good. I know you killed Evelyn Lanier."

He looked at me, and for a long moment his eyes were absolutely empty of any expression whatever. No hot lights, no anything.

"Killed?" he said.

"Killed," I said. "Killed by you." I glanced around, and I saw what I had been almost certain I would see. On the dresser stood a pair of binoculars.

Still his face was utterly blank. "Evelyn's dead?"

"Very dead, Mr. Cannon. She threw you over, and you brooded about it, but you didn't do anything about it until tonight."

The hot lights were coming back. "I don't know what the hell you're trying to pull," he said.

"Just hold it," I told him. "You were sitting over here stewing in your own juices, and then you did what you probably do a lot. You took those binoculars off the dresser and looked over into Evelyn's room. It's a straight shoot across the court."

"Jesus," he whispered. "How crazy can you get?"

"You saw her show Charley Boxer some money. You heard her tell him exactly how much she had."

"You're just crazy enough to be amusing," he said. "Tell me, pal — how in hell could I *hear* her tell him *anything*? That room's eighty feet away."

"The point is, you understood because you can read lips. Charley told me you'd had a head wound in the war and that it left you deaf for a couple of years. That's long enough to learn to read lips."

Cannon moved two short steps toward me.

"Easy does it," I told him. "You hated her for what she'd done to you, and when you read her lips and knew she had ten thousand dollars in cash —" I shrugged "— well, it was just too much for you. You went over and got even with her, and got ten thousand dollars for your troubles besides."

He took another step toward me. "One thing, friend. One little thing. How the hell can you prove this?"

"There'll be people you've known in the past who'll swear to the fact that you can read lips," I said. "And those binoculars over there will — be focused exactly right."

"And you call that proof?"

"There's something else," I said. "You mailed a letter tonight. If I had ten thousand dollars of my own, I'd bet every dime of it that that letter contains *Evelyn's* ten thousand dollars. It's an old trick, mailing money to yourself in care of general delivery in some other town. They'll search that mail box, Cannon — and when they do, you're a cooked goose."

He was fast, but not fast enough. His left hand stabbed down beneath the pillow on his bed and came up with a snub-nosed revolver that was spitting bullets as fast as he could trigger. But I was a professional, and he was not. He kept pulling the trigger, but his gun was doing him no good, because my first slug had caught him squarely in the stomach and he was in no condition to do anything more than scream and fire blindly in my general direction.

I stepped in close and knocked the gun from his hand. Then he started to fall, and I caught him beneath the arms and eased him over on the bed. I'm no revenger, and I don't try to mete out justice. It hurt me to shoot a man in the belly, and I wished to hell I'd had another split second to aim and wing him instead.



MUGGED AND PRINTED

In this issue, MICKEY SPILLANE concludes his four-part serial, *Everybody's Watching Me*, and a well-worth-waiting-for windup it is. At



the same time, Spillane's book sales continue to skyrocket, with *Time* reporting close to six and a half million copies of his books sold in 1952. His latest thriller, *Kiss Me Deadly*, has held a spot on the best-seller list for the past month, and Spillane's

agent has concluded a \$250,000 movie deal which will bring Mike Hammer to the screen in the near future. Crime pays, it would seem.

ROBERT PATRICK WILMOT (*The G-Notes*) was born in Butte, Montana and ran away at sixteen to Mexico. He took a fling at Hollywood and did stints in Minneapolis and Chicago as a reporter. For some years he was the reluctant proprietor of a traveling carnival which he inherited from his father. When the depression and hostile sheriffs put the carnival out of business, he became a publicity man and eventually editor of a large newspaper in the Pacific Northwest. With the publication of his first novel, *Blood In Your Eye*, Wilmot emerged as a really major writer in the mystery genre.

RICHARD ELLINGTON is conspicuously noted for his success in three very different fields of crime writing. As a novelist (*Shoot*



The Works, It's A Crime, Stone Cold Dead, Exit For A Dame), he is the creator of Steve Drake who romps through *Fan Club*. Also a radio script writer, he has done some of the most popular shows for *Top Guy* and *The Fat Man*. And as a television writer, he has

been a steady contributor to *Man Against Crime* and other high calibre programs. Lives in St. John, Virgin Islands on a piece of land called Gallow's Point. It seems rather appropriate.

DAVID GOODIS hit the big time with his novel, "*Dark Passage*" which was made into a movie starring the Bogart-Bacall team. Goodis wrote his first novel when he was twenty-one and prophetically called it, "*The Ignited*" . . . later threw it into the furnace. Since then he's written hundreds of stories, wrote for radio in New York and is now working in Hollywood. Outstanding novels



include *Dark Passage*, *Nightfall* and *Behold This Woman*. Philosophy? . . . Goodis: ". . . work hard . . . but don't ever worry about a thing."

RICHARD DEMING has been everything from a door-to-door gold buyer (a lucrative racket during the depression, he says) to executive director of a Red Cross Chapter. His two longest jobs have been with the Army and the American Red Cross, after which he jumped into full-time writing. He is usually preoccupied with Manville Moon, the private eye featured in *The Gallows In My Garden* and the forthcoming *Tweak The Devil's Nose*. But *Mugger Murder* is a completely different type of story, and exhibits Deming's versatility. It also provides some damn fine reading for us all.

Esquire's editorial devoted to HENRY KANE, tabbed him as: "author, bon vivant, stoic, student, tramp, lawyer, philosopher . . . the lad who works off a hangover conceived in a Hoboken dive by swooshing down large orders of Eggs Benedict at the Waldorf on the morning after. . . the man who can use polysyllables on Third Avenue and certain ancient monosyllables on Park Avenue."



If you've read Kane's *Halo For Nobody*, *Hang By The Neck*, or *Until You Are Dead*, you'll certainly enjoy the latest exploits of Peter Chambers. If you haven't, enjoy the story anyway.