



BLACK MASK

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K. S. WHITE, Editor

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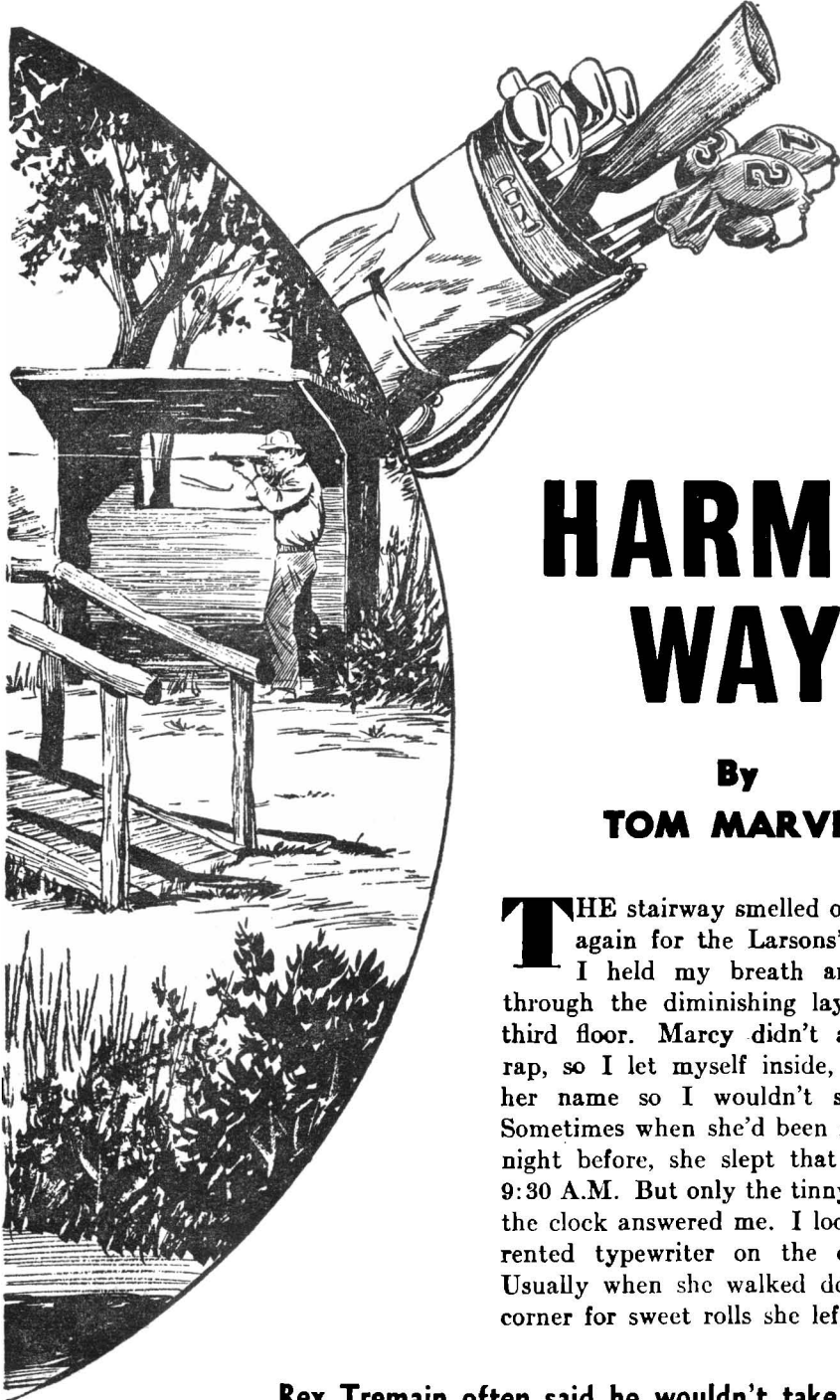


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The first shot missed. It hit the girl in the pink hat.



HARM'S WAY

By
TOM MARVIN

THE stairway smelled of fish. Cod again for the Larsons' breakfast. I held my breath and ran up through the diminishing layers to the third floor. Marcy didn't answer my rap, so I let myself inside, whispering her name so I wouldn't startle her. Sometimes when she'd been restless the night before, she slept that late, until 9:30 A.M. But only the tinny ticking of the clock answered me. I looked at the rented typewriter on the card table. Usually when she walked down to the corner for sweet rolls she left a note in

Rex Tremain often said he wouldn't take a million dollars for his wife, Marcy, dead or alive. Now the day had come for him to prove it.

her new, proud typing. But the typewriter was empty. "Marcy," I said again. I threw my cap on the mangy sofa and tiptoed into the bedroom. A man was sitting motionless on the bed.

I took a step backward, my heart caught by surprise. He sat there as alert and unblinking as a rooster. He didn't move.

Something told me, though, that he wasn't a prowler. Or the gas man, or a plumber. He was too easy and sure. As if he had a right to be sitting in my tacky little flat. As if he had been waiting for me. The man was a police officer. A cop in soft clothes.

"Where is she?" I said.

The man didn't stir.

"Where is she?"

His voice was as stolid as he. "Where did you think she was?"

"Where did I think—why, here!"

"Where?"

"Here! Here. At home. Getting my breakfast . . . Where's Marcy?"

"Now, you didn't know she's in Emergency, did you? With a bullet in her head."

"No!" I said. "Oh, no!"

He was a broad, dish-faced man with a gray-streaked mustache. He wriggled his bottom comfortably on the bedspread. Vaguely I noticed that the bed had been made. As Marcy always made it, so tight a half-dollar would bounce. "What do you mean, no?" the man asked.

"I mean," I said, "what happened?"

"Let's you and me find out."

He slid off the bed and crossed the ratty mulberry rug to the door. Foolishly I picked up my cap and trailed after him. We pattered downstairs, through the reek of the Larsons' breakfast cod, and got into his car without speaking. He made a U-turn.

"What was she doing over on the Flats?" the cop said.

"Flats?" I echoed. Suddenly released, my fear and confusion made me boiling mad. "Quit asking questions! I'm asking questions!"

"You're Rex Tremain, ain't you? Your wife's name is Marcia May? She was over on the Flats this morning. Walking in Harm's Way. She got shot in the skull. How, we ain't sure. But I aim to find out."

"She's not—dead or anything?"

"Which way are you hoping? A guy and his dog found her. Did she work out on the Flats? Was she visiting somebody? Eight o'clock in the morning is a hell of a time to visit somebody."

"I don't know," I said. "I just got home from my route."

"What route?"

"Milk route. I'm a relief driver for Pagel's Dairy."

"Is your route near the Flats?"

"Flats? What are you trying to say, you. . ."

He swung the car off Clybourn Avenue into the circular drive behind the Emergency hospital. "Shut up," he said.

WE went up in an elevator and through some swinging doors. Two nurses and a white-shirted interne, dressed like a baker in summertime, were wheeling a hospital cart. On the cart lay a white-swathed, motionless figure. "Is that her, Tremain?" the cop said.

I could see only the lips and the tip of the nose. The lips didn't look as sweet as Marcy's. The cop nodded, and a nurse unwound some of the mummy wrappings. . . Her eyes were closed, her face shiny, her cheeks sunken.

The interne grabbed my shoulders. He was a powerful little guy. "You'll have to go now, buddy," he said. "Now!"

Shivering, I followed the cop down the hall to an alcove stuffed with wicker

furniture. "Smoke," the cop said. "They're going to do a preliminary. I'll be back in an hour."

I didn't want to smoke, but obediently I lit my pipe. How long is an hour in a hospital waiting room? Much more than just an hour. Nurses flitted past on rubber soles. Over a loud speaker a genteel voice intoned: "Attention internes and residents, a pathological conference is now going on. A pathological conference is now. . ."

Marcy? What's a pathological conference? I started praying blind.

When the cop returned, even he walked on noiseless soles. "Let's go, Tremain," he said. We went down into the sub-basement and through a dim tunnel.

"But I've got to be there!" I said.

"They won't let you. The preliminary's over, anyway."

"Who did it? Who shot her?"

"Who?" the cop echoed.

We climbed rutted steps and passed through a barred door into a sour-smelling room. A stoop-shouldered policeman wearing a frayed sweater, with a couple of pounds of keys hanging from his belt locked the barred door behind us. The man who had brought me knocked on another door marked *Captain Herbert*.

I dropped on a scarred bench. I couldn't stop my pipe from rattling against my teeth. Four men trooped up the corridor and shook the barred door noisily. "Reporters," said the stoop-shouldered cop sociably, getting up to admit them.

He jerked his head back at me. "That's the dame's husband." The reporters looked at me as if I were a freak. Incurious, unabashed looks. I wanted desperately to ask them questions about *Marcy*, but their look dried me up.

"You Rex Tremain?" one of them said.

I stood up. I don't know if I nodded or shivered.

"How old is she? The cops say twenty-one. Emergency claims twenty-five. What was she doing on the Flats?"

"She's twenty-four," I said. "We've been married two years. July second, nineteen-forty-six . . . Maybe she got restless again and went for a walk. . ."

"How do you mean, restless?"

"We have only two and a half rooms, and I'm away at classes. . ."

"What classes? Ugly said you were a milk driver."

"Ugly?"

"Sergeant Gilogly. The Irish meatball. The cop that grabbed you—that notified you she was shot."

"I'm a student at Hauxhurst University. I drive a milk truck three mornings a week for Pagel's. . ."

"How do you mean, she gets restless?"

"Well, I'm always out on the route, or at classes, and when I'm home, I'm studying. So she doesn't have much fun and . . . Well, she takes long walks. . ."

"All the way over in Harm's Way? At eight in the morning?"

They looked at me, not believing anything. I said: "I never knew her to go to Harm's Way before."

"You got fifteen hundred dollars, Tremain?"

My pipe wouldn't hold still again. I looked down at my scuffed brown shoes, dyed black; my brown trousers, dyed black. Everything brown-dyed-black. "I've got eight dollars. Until Pagel's pays me thirty-six on Friday."

"You'd better have fifteen hundred," the reporter said.

They trooped to the barred door. They hadn't let me ask my questions. They hadn't even let me finish my answers to theirs. They were a pack of ghouls. "Damn you!" I yelled. "*How is she?*"

One of them turned around. The other three disappeared down the corridor. The one who came back to my scarred bench was youngish and smooth-faced, but gray-haired and a head taller than I.

He said: "They dug the bullet out. But that's only the easy half of it. She can't talk and maybe she'll be paralyzed, unless her head is sewn together right. Even if she lives. Excuse the plain talk."

"But who shot her?"

"Who knows? Personally I think she got hit by a stray shot. It was a twenty-two long rifle. It went in over her left ear. From the back, at an angle. Did you ever hear of Doctor Bart Mostel?"

"Mostel?" I said. "Mostel?"

"A brain surgeon. The best. It would take fifteen hundred bucks to get Mostel here from Chicago. Maybe he could unscramble her brain."

At last I couldn't master the trembles at all.

"Can't you scare up fifteen hundred, Tremain?" asked the reporter. "From your old man? Or hers?"

I tried desperately to sound as casual as he. As if things like this happened every day to me, too. "She has no family. My mother lives on what I manage to send her."

"You need fifteen hundred bucks for your wife, Tremain."

"But there must be some other doctor who'll do it! We're broke. She needs an operation. It's as simple as that."

"Some other doctor would be glad to try. Some guy with two left thumbs who'd like to see if he could do a carving job outside his jurisdiction. I know Mostel very well. He's the only man. Do you want her dead?"

DEAR God, did I want. . . Fifteen hundred dollars between Marcy and no Marcy. Fifteen hundred between *me* and no Marcy. . .

"The man who shot her can pay Mostel!" I said.

He said mildly: "Who is he?"

"I'll find him!" I said.

"Did you ever try to trace a stray shot, Tremain?"

I didn't answer him.

"You can't solve a thing like this just by dropping a nickel in a wishing well. It ain't that easy."

"I never had anything easy," I said bitterly. "But can't the cops do it? There's a gun club over on the Flats. Gun club members usually are men with money. At least fifteen hundred dollars."

"Ugly checked the gun club. Nobody was shooting this morning." He looked at me curiously. "Cops are too busy to run down stray shots. You really going to try to trace it?"

"Do you think I want her dead?" I said.

"Well, good luck. I'm Kilarkin of the *Times*. Anything I can do, phone me at the press room in headquarters."

He didn't mean it. The cop wearing the keys let him through the barred door. I crossed the sour-smelling room and knocked on Captain Herbert's door. Sergeant Gilogly opened it.

"I'm going now," I said.

"That you are. With me."

We went down the rutted steps and got into his car. He headed up Clybourn Avenue.

"You trying to find out who fired that stray shot?" I said.

"Who claims it was a stray shot?"

"Kilarkin of the *Times*."

"He's smarter than me. He thinks."

We stopped at Pagel's Dairy garage. "Get your time card," Sergeant Gilogly said. "Where it shows what time you started work today."

"Wait a minute! Are you saying I shot my wife?"

"Your time card."

I slipped it out of the wall rack and

he studied it. Rex Tremain: IN 5:28 A.M. OUT 9:14 A.M. "Let's make your rounds," Gilogly said. "Draw the truck you drove this morning."

"That'll take three hours!"

"The hospital won't let you see her anyway. No visitors. We can't even ask her what she was doing on the Flats at eight A.M."

Nailer, the garage foreman, issued my truck and we drove out to Route Fourteen. In almost a daze I stopped at the first gate and Gilogly went up to the house and talked with the woman. He came back.

"She got her milk O.K. this morning. So far so good. Let's go. And don't drive slower than you usually do."

"Say what you're thinking!" I said. "Speak up like a man."

"Push off."

We ran my whole route. I scarcely heard what Gilogly said. All I could think of was: Marcy, Marcy, live! All the long hours of work and study, all the skimpy meals, all the exhaustion of body and nerves seemed to catch up with me at once. I wasn't sharp. I just wasn't sharp.

We got back to Pagel's at four. "Satisfied?" I said bitterly. He gave me his cold, unblinking rooster-look and climbed into his car.

I called the hospital on the garage telephone. The floor nurse said Marcy was no better, no worse. "What's that mean?" I said. "I'm coming up there."

"No visitors, Mr. Tremain. Even you."

Nailer, the foreman, was listening. For a head shocker he wasn't a bad guy. He gassed up a light panel job and handed me the key. "Bring it back whenever you're finished," Nailer said. "You must have things to do."

I couldn't think of anything to do but drive home. The flat was quieter than a cave. A shabby cave. Shabbier than

ever without Marcy there in her pink housedress, her only decent one. I perked coffee and ate some cold tapioca pudding that I found in the icebox. I sat down at the typewriter. It was our one extravagance. She'd rented it for me to type my schoolwork on, and she'd taught herself how to type on it. Twisting a sheet of paper into the machine I wrote: \$1,500. It might as well have been a million. I kept hitting the zero key: \$1,50000000000. . . .

How do you start tracking the man who fired a stray shot into your wife's head? *If it had been a stray shot. What was Marcy doing in Harm's Way? At eight in the morning. Just walking or meeting someone? A woman, or a man? Who had seen her fall? Who had found her lying there? A man and his dog, Gilogly had said.*

I went down the fishy staircase and called the press room on the wall tele-

phone. It sounded as if I had interrupted a crap game, but finally Kilarkin of the *Times* came to the phone.

"Who was that man with the dog?" I said.

I heard him shuffling papers. He sounded annoyed. "His name was Sal LoCoco, 9187 Harm's Way. He found her on the road opposite the golf club."

"You mean the gun club."

"Golf club. There's a private golf club out there too."

It was five in the afternoon when I found Sal LoCoco, washing his 1941 Chevvie in the alley behind his house. An Irish terrier pup squatted in the shade of the garage doors. LoCoco wiped his fingers on a wad of waste and we shook hands. He was a swarthy, raw-boned young man with hair that looked like a black strawstack.

"Be finished in a minute," LoCoco said. "Then we'll take a ride out there." He cut some strips off a roll of white adhesive tape and pasted them on the doors of his car. They formed the words: VETERANS CAB. "I pick up a few nickels hacking nights," he explained.

We whistled the Irish terrier into Pagel's truck and headed out Harm's Way. The houses grew wider apart until, at Ninety-third Street, which was the city limits, they practically disappeared.

I read the speedometer. "This is nine and three-tenth miles from our house," I said. "I can't imagine her walking it."

"She got hit about two miles farther out," LoCoco said. "Could be she rode the bus as far as Ninety-third. The bus line runs farther, clear out to Prothero. That's the railroad's big switching yards. But you got to pay an extra zone fare to stay on the bus after Ninety-third. Maybe she got off there and started walking."

"But where would she be walking to?"

"There's nothing out here except the gun club and the golf club and Prothero

yards. A swamp and some woods. . . Pull up here."

I stopped on the shoulder and we got out. "Here." LoCoco pointed. "She fell here."

CHAPTER TWO

Sand Trap

I DIDN'T want to look but I did. There was nothing to see but a sanded spot on the concrete.

Aside from the private golf course the area was desolate. Harm's Way was a causeway running due north across the Flats, elevated perhaps twelve feet above the surrounding land. Over east the choppy lake glittered in the sunlight like a teaspoonful of diamonds. On the shore, among the sand dunes, the gun club nestled. Between the gun club and Harm's Way ran the railroad spur linking the main line with Prothero yards. A thin row of elms and catalpas stood between the highway and the tracks.

To the west lay the golf course, dotted with clumps of trees and cut up into squares of various shades of green. Above a roll in the land I could see the red tile roof of the clubhouse. Between Harm's Way and the golf course stretched an elongated swamp bordered by scummy-kneed willow trees. A neck of the swamp extended partly into the course, with a curving rustic bridge over it so the golfers could cross from the sixteenth hole to the seventeenth tee. There was a tiny rustic storm shelter near the bridge.

I thought: What a place to get hit. Even the red-winged blackbirds fluttering in the swamp couldn't make the slimy place look pretty.

"Tell me," I said.

LoCoco pointed at his Irish terrier. "His name is Goofer. Once in a while I bring him out here and let him scare up

woodchucks or rabbits on the gun club side. He don't go in the swamp because there's water snakes. We were walking back this morning, maybe three hundred yards north of here, when I saw her fall. I ain't sure I even heard the gun. She was walking north, toward us."

"The bullet hit over the left ear, from the back. It must have come from those fields south of the golf course. Did you see anybody in the fields?"

"Nobody," LoCoco said. "But your figuring ain't necessarily right. It was windy this morning, out of the north. She kept turning her head, maybe so her eyes wouldn't water. I did the same thing when I came out earlier. Maybe she was even walking backward when it hit. That would make it the gun club side. I ain't sure because I wasn't looking at her right at that minute. I only noticed her far off because of her hat."

"Pink," I said. "She bought it yesterday. First one since we were married."

"It sure was an unlucky hat."

"Was there anybody else on the road?"

"Yes," LoCoco said.

"Who?"

"A man was walking behind her about two hundred yards. I didn't get a good look at him, but I'm sure he didn't have a gun. When she dropped he just stood still like a zombie. Then he ran. Maybe he was a bum or had a record and didn't want any questions asked. I don't know where he faded to. I legged it up the road to reach her, and I forgot about him."

"Don't you know what he looked like?"

LoCoco inspected me carefully. "Sergeant Gilogly already questioned me, Mac. Now I know why he asked if the guy was about five-seven and wore a milkman's cap."

I said bitterly: "But it wasn't me, was it?"

"I don't know, Mac. I didn't get a good gander. I'm sorry."

We got back into Pagel's truck. "I want to see who's at the gun club," I said. I swung the truck under the arch and bumped down toward the lake. LoCoco stayed in the cab and I walked around the clubhouse. A man in overalls was calking a rowboat inverted on two sawhorses.

"I'm looking for the manager or the caretaker," I said.

"I'm them," the man said. "Will Varnes is the name." He didn't stop calking. He was a gaunt man about thirty-five years old with a brick red sunburned face and eyebrows bleached pink.

"That woman who was shot up on the road. . ."

"Now, I've gone all over that! Nobody's been shooting at this club since last evening. Nobody! I already told that to the cops. And nobody's going to prove any different!"

I got as testy as he did. "Don't bet that nobody will prove it! What makes you so sure there wasn't any firing on your range? Were you here all the time?"

"I'm here more than I'm anywhere else! And I say she wasn't hit by any stray fired off our range. We got rules against things like that. What's it to you, anyway? You're no cop, you're a milkman."

"I'm her husband. And I'm going to find the guy who shot her!"

"Going to give him a beating?"

"Yes. For running away. At least, he's going to pay her doctor bills."

Varnes stopped calking and looked at my uniform cap. He said: "How you going to trace him?"

"I'm going to question every soul in this neighborhood. I'll get transferred to this route if necessary. Somebody knows something. It's just a question of finding *who*."

"Well, I don't know anything," he said, nettled. He picked up a handful of rope, dismissing me. I went back to the truck.

LoCoco asked: "Any luck?" I shook my head and turned the truck around. When I delivered him at his house he shook hands again and said, "If there's anything I can do." He meant it a little more than Kilarkin of the *Times* had.

I drove back to Ninety-third and telephoned the hospital from a chuck wagon. The night nurse gave me no more information than the day nurse had. Mrs. Tremain is no better, no worse. I hung up and ordered some pie and coffee. It left me with seven dollars and sixty cents. I was forty cents further away from the fifteen hundred dollars and Dr. Mostel than ever.

AS much as anything I wondered what Marcy had been doing out in Harm's Way, eleven miles from home. If she had gone to meet someone, who was it? At eight in the morning, in such a desolate swampland. . .

Assume she'd ridden the bus to the city limits. Assume it had taken her a half hour to walk to where she'd been hit. Then she must have got off the bus at Ninety-third Street about seven-thirty. Maybe the bus driver would remember her. Or her pink hat.

I spent another nickel to telephone Al Rogers' house. Al drove Route 31, which took in this neighborhood. Maybe he'd noticed Marcy himself.

"She wore a pink hat, Al," I said. "Brown coat, brown shoes. A girl about five-four. Nice legs."

"I'd have remembered the legs," Al said. "But I don't."

"Do you know the bus drivers who pull into Ninety-third about seven-thirty?"

"It could be any one of three drivers,

Rex. Look in the phone book for Tom Shevlin or Jerry Sloan. They live somewhere on the West Side. I only know the third guy as Bud, but Shevlin or Sloan could tell you where to reach him."

"I'm obliged, Al."

"And listen, Rex. There's an old gaffer named Mannix lives out Harm's Way a couple blocks. Last house on the left, a little stone place. He's a retired tuck pointer. Always prowling around. Never misses a trick. Maybe he can help. Anyway, if you're feeling low he'll give you a snort of his elderberry wine."

"I'll try him, Al."

"If there's anything I can do," Al said. He sounded as if he meant it.

I got the telephone directory and some more nickels. Tom Shevlin was out bowling but his wife gave me Jerry Sloan's number. Sloan didn't remember Marcy, but he knew the number for the third driver, a man named Emory Budlong. I called Budlong.

"Pink hat and brown coat?" Budlong said. "B'god, I figured that was the girl! I read about it in the paper tonight and I had a hunch that was the girl." I could hear him chattering an aside to his wife: "This guy's her husband."

"Where did she get aboard?" I asked.

"I don't remember, but she got off at Ninety-third. I pull in there at seven-thirty-four. She asked how much the extra zone fare was. I guess she didn't want to pay the dime. Anyway, she started walking."

"Did you see her again?"

"I passed her in Harm's Way and went out to the end of the run at Prothero. A gang of railroad guys got off and I started right back. I passed a young fellow walking his dog, then her, then another guy hiking behind her, pretty far back."

"Did you get a look at that last man?"

"I wouldn't know him again from a bale of hay."

"Was he carrying a rifle?"

"I guess not, or I'd remember him."

"Was he wearing a railroad man's cap, or gauntlets?"

"He's a blank to me," Budlong said.

"Was there anybody on the gun range?"

"Nobody. There were a couple golfers over west, and a switch engine moving slow along the spur, down in the hollow."

"Listen," I said. "Did she look—well, restless? Or unhappy? When she got off the bus, I mean."

"No," Budlong said. "She was smiling and sort of excited."

"Excited?"

"Like she had some place important to go and wanted to get there right away."

"Oh," I said. "Well, when she asked about the zone fare, how did she say it. Did she ask how much the fare was to the gun club, or to Prothero? Did she say it like that?"

I had to wait for Budlong to remember. "She just said, 'How much does it cost to stay on?' Or to keep riding. Something like that."

"Has a cop named Sergeant Gilogly talked to you?"

"No."

I don't know why that gave me satisfaction. I said: "Thanks, Mr. Budlong."

"Anything else, just call on me, Tre-main."

I went out and turned Pagel's truck north in Harm's Way. She left the bus at seven-thirty-four and started walking, looking excited. What was Marcy excited about?

An old man was sitting on the steps of the little stone house. He wore a white shirt and black patent leather tie and his pink face was newly shaven. Marcy would have said: What a *clean* old man.

I introduced myself, and Mr. Mannix said: "Sit down, my boy. A black day, hey?"

"I'm trying to trace that stray shot. Al Rogers suggested you might have an idea."

"I got no ideas. You know what I mean is?"

"No. What do you mean?"

"I mean I didn't notice anything unusual."

"Isn't a woman getting shot unusual around here?"

"But *shooting* ain't. You know what I mean is? Every fellow around here does some shooting. Even I still do. You want to see my rifle? It's a old Savage, takes a .303 cartridge. The papers say your wife stopped a .22 long. Could you use a snort of elderberry wine?"

He poured the wine out of a green

bottle. It made me feel even worse, light-headed but no lift. I said: "I still think it came from the gun club."

"No shooting there this morning," Mr. Mannix said. "Heard some on the railroad tracks, though. There's an old fellow works on the road has fun shooting varmints from the caboose. Hawks, crows, pine squirrels."

I set my wine glass on the step. "Can I use your telephone? I want to check the railroad for his name and address."

"Don't need to check," Mr. Mannix said mildly. "Name is Frank Hess. Lives out in Prothero. Big yellow frame place across from the roundhouse. Don't mention I sent you. Know what I mean is?"

Dusk was fading into dark when I found the yellow house, set in an acre of velvety lawn. Frank Hess, rocking in a porch swing, was a rugged, beetle-browed man of about sixty.

"For one thing," he said, "I never shoot toward the road when there's somebody on it. For another, I use the proper load. A twenty-two long can be dangerous for danged near a mile. And for another thing, I been shooting varmints for forty years and I don't fire strays. When I shoot I hit."

"Isn't there a law against shooting from a train?"

He said guardedly: "You may be right. But the point here is did I shoot your wife?"

"Were you using a twenty-two today?"

Hess grumbled. He went into the yellow house and came back with a rifle. "It's a Winchester 52. Shoots a twenty-two. Want to take it down to headquarters and have the ballistics men test it?"

I hesitated.

"Go ahead, if it will make you happier. But it's already been tested. Jack Gilogly, the cop, was out here today. Your wife wasn't hit with my rifle."

IT WAS ten-thirty when I parked the truck in the lot next to the flat. I went up to the shabby flat and snapped on the light quick and stood there for a minute, feeling as lonely as I ever hope to be. I looked into the bedroom, half-expecting to see the dish-faced Sergeant Gilogly sitting as alert as a rooster on our bed.

The sheet of paper was still in the rented typewriter. \$1,500,000,000,000. There were no sounds but the creak of the floor when I walked. Even the tinny clock had run down. I roamed around restlessly for a while, looking down at the ratty carpet, my brown shoes dyed black, my brown trousers dyed black. It was the first time since we'd been married that we were apart at nightfall.

A copy of the *Times* from the day before lay scattered on the sofa. I smoothed it out and started reading. Nothing made sense for more than a paragraph. I skipped to the comics. There was a hole in page 23, about three inches square, as if someone had slashed out the piece with a pin. On the reverse side was the beginning of the want-ad section.

I tore out the page and went down to Larson's apartment and knocked until the old man opened up. "Yesterday's *Times*?" he said, yawning. "Come in, Rex, and have a beer while I look around."

I got two cans out of the refrigerator while Larson sleepily pawed through the book case, the magazine basket, the welter of junk on the table. Finally he found it. I fitted my page of the *Times* over page 24 of Larson's *Times*.

The boldface heading read: HELP WANTED. The third ad read: "Typist and clerk. Experienced or beginner. 40 hr. week; good pay. No Sundays. Hosp. and life ins. Apply Mr. Stanhope, Harm's Way Golf Club, after 8:30 A.M."

The beer glass was trembling in my

hand. A different kind of shakes, though. Not that this meant much, but now I knew what Marcy had been doing on the swampy Flats at eight in the morning. Which was a hell of a time to go visiting. She'd wanted to be first in Mr. Stanhope's line of applicants. She'd taught herself to type on our extravagantly rented mill, and now she was going to earn some money to help us. She hadn't gone there for any of the reasons which I'd refused to admit to myself.

Larson gave me five nickels for a quarter and I telephoned the golf club. "Don't you know what time it is?" a sleepy voice demanded. "Stanhope will be here at half-past eight in the morning. What do you want?"

I didn't tell him. I hung up and called Emergency. Marcy's floor nurse said there was no change. "Can't I come down and see her?" I said. "I'll just stand in the doorway."

"If I made the rules, Mr. Tremain, you could. But I just enforce them. We'll call you if there's any change, either way."

Back up in the flat I tried hard for an hour to go to sleep. Something was missing, besides Marcy. Then I realized it was the tinny clock, now silent. I wound it, and pretty soon I dropped off, thinking: She was just on her way to get a job. Just a job.

When I woke up I felt embalmed. It was six-forty-five and already sunny. I checked the hospital again and got the no-change routine. I pulled the truck out of the lot and drove up to Ninety-third. Al Rogers' truck was parked near the chuck wagon and he was sitting at the counter, talking to a man with a brick-red sunburned face and eyebrows bleached pink; Will Varnes, the gun club caretaker.

Varnes remembered me. He said: "How you making out?"

"I got a good lead," I said. "At the golf club."

Varnes paid for his breakfast. "Just so you get the gun club out of your head. I promise you nobody was shooting there yesterday morning." He shook hands with me. "Good luck, Tremain. If I hear anything, I'll let you know right away."

Al Rogers offered to buy my breakfast. "You look even skinnier than usual," he said. He stayed around for a while, trying to cheer me up, but then he had to go back to the job.

At eight-fifteen I drove out Harm's Way to the golf club. Mr. Stanhope kept me waiting a half hour. He was a large, florid man with an harassed expression. He talked in nervous spurts and swore a lot. A blue-eyed cat prowled around the office as if he owned it.

"That was a hell of a note," Stanhope said. "Is she O.K.?"

"I don't know. She had a preliminary operation but she'll need another one. Did she ever get here to see you?"

"I didn't even know until now that she was headed here. As far as I know she never reached the club." Stanhope batted the cat off his desk. "If I can do anything," he said.

"The bus driver saw some golfers on the course. If you could figure out which of them were likely to be near the road, maybe they saw something. . . ."

Stanhope took some papers from a drawer and skimmed through them. "These are the reservations for yesterday. It's possible, from the starting times, that Mr. Fee and Mr. Albright were on the sixteenth or seventeenth about that time."

"Where could I find them?"

"At their office. Willard Fee and Henry J. Albright. They're partners in an investment business. Sometimes they play a round before they go to the office."

CHAPTER THREE

Clay Pigeons and Dead Ducks

BEFORE starting back to town I walked across the course to the sixteenth green. The sun was strengthening and I sat down on a log in the shade of the rustic storm shelter, cooling off. The red-winged blackbirds in the swamp were beautiful to watch. I went out on the bridge over the swamp neck and looked at Harm's Way. The curve of the bridge raised me to eye level with the causeway. If Marcy had fallen while Mr. Fee and Mr. Albright were on the bridge, they could have seen her. But if they weren't on the bridge at that moment, she was out of sight.

The blackbirds didn't seem to mind the swamp smells. I heaved a stick at them to keep them fluttering. They darted around but were back rocking on their reeds even before the stick sank into the muck. I took off my coat and hiked back across the sunny fairways to Pagel's truck.

Fee and Albright, Inc., had offices in the Flat Iron building. Mr. Fee was out, so I left my name for Mr. Albright. He was a pink-cheeked man with graying black hair, wearing a suit of big-shot blue. His elevator shoes made him walk a little like a guy with two artificial legs. His desk was a busy man's fortress of telephones and buzzers, but he didn't rush me.

"We didn't see her," Albright said. "Didn't even hear a shot. Perhaps we had driven the seventeenth by that time."

"Did you see a man walking north on Harm's Way about two-hundred yards south of the bridge?"

"All I recollect was a bus turning in from Prothero."

"How about Mr. Fee? When will he be in?"

"He went to Pittsburgh on business. We expect him back Friday. Why don't you come in Friday about eleven o'clock?"

I didn't know where to go from there, so I went to the hospital. They let me stand in the doorway, but all I could see were bandages and blankets.

I went around the corner to the press room in headquarters. Kilarkin of the *Times* was sitting in a casino game but he threw in his hand and came over to talk with me. I told him what I'd been doing.

"I think you're foolish," Kilarkin said. "Never mind who shot her. Concentrate on getting fifteen hundred bucks for that operation. Now what are you fixing to do?"

I still had about seven dollars. "I'm going to phone Mr. Fee in Pittsburgh. I can't wait until Friday."

"Call his house first," Kilarkin advised. "Find out what hotel he's staying at. Maybe I can put the Pittsburgh call on my expense account so it won't cost you anything."

A young woman at Mr. Fee's house, perhaps his daughter, gave me the name of the Pittsburgh hotel after I carefully explained my story. Kilarkin put in the Pittsburgh call, but Mr. Fee wasn't registered yet, although he had a reservation.

The shakes were bothering me again. "I told you my luck was all black," I said bitterly. Kilarkin didn't answer. He sat on the window sill, studying the paper-cluttered floor. Another reporter pulled out of the casino game and came over to the window.

"What's cooking over here?" he asked casually.

"Nothing," Kilarkin said. "We were just going to lunch."

He took me downstairs but we didn't go to lunch. Kilarkin made some calls in a telephone booth. Presently he came

out. "Fee had a reservation on a G&V train leaving for Pittsburgh at ten o'clock yesterday morning. But he didn't use it." Kilarkin looked past me, over my shoulder. "Did your wife know Fee?"

"Wait a minute!" I said.

Kilarkin shrugged. "I'll look around further. Keep in touch. And you really ought to get my old friend Mostel up here."

I went down to the hot street. Now where? I couldn't think of any better place, so I drove over to Pagel's garage. Nailer, the head shocker, said: "Call Al Rogers right away." He handed me a slip of paper on which was written Mr. Mannix's name and number. I called it.

"Rex!" Al said excitedly. "Guess what, boy? I found the guy!"

"What guy?" I said.

"The guy that shot your wife. A kid, about ten years old. He was shooting blackbirds in the swamp and a shot went wild."

"A kid? No, Al!"

"He admits it. Come on out. I'm holding him here."

All the way out to Mr. Mannix's stone house my heart stayed in my boots. How was I going to get Dr. Mostel's \$1,500 from a ten year old kid? Unless his father was fixed to pay it. . . .

Al Rogers, Mr. Mannix and Frank Hess, the railroad man, were sitting on the stone porch. Hess' train was standing in the hollow across Harm's Way, lazily smoking.

The kid was a brown-haired, pale youngster wearing patched jeans, scared as a rabbit.

"Now, don't whap him," Al Rogers greeted me. "It was an accident. He was afraid to admit it before now. His ma made him."

The boy was quivering as badly as I was when he handed me the rifle. It looked expensive, polished and shiny and well-cared for.

"Show me how you did it," I said. "Show me where you were standing and how you aimed and fired."

Old Man Mannix admonished the kid: "Be careful, Artie. You're too little to handle a weapon like that." Aside, he whispered to me: "His name is Artie Bliss. Lives with his ma behind the golf club. She's a widow. You know what I mean is?"

The boy eyed me nervously. I said: "Take it easy, son. Just pretend that the lady was walking over near that tree. Where were you standing and how did you shoot?"

He took a bead on the tree and let fly. The bullet whined off into the vacant fields. Frank Hess said: "Do that again, kid."

"Once is enough," I said. "He can shoot the thing, that's all that was bothering me."

I handed the rifle to Al Rogers. "Al, will you take it to Sergeant Gilogly? Have him check it with the bullet that hit Marcy." I motioned to the boy and we got into Pagel's truck. "Why did you turn yourself in?" I said.

"My mother made me. She told me to go find the milkman and confess. I guess I got the wrong milkman, I got Mr. Rogers."

MY HEART sank even lower when I saw the boy's house. Unpainted, tilting, scuffed bare earth for lawn, a half dozen hounds scratching themselves on the porch. The odor of cabbage soup was heavy in the hall.

His mother was a blonde who hadn't been to the drug store lately. Her clothes looked nothing like Marcy's but they were just as cheap.

She said nervously: "Will they arrest him? I don't know what I can do. How is your wife? I mean, I haven't any money. . . ."

"How could you afford such an expensive gun for him?"

"I didn't. It was a present."

The kid said: "My uncle gave it to me."

"His Uncle Chris, in Des Moines," Mrs. Bliss said. "I shouldn't have let him use it."

I said heavily: "The police will make tests. Maybe it isn't the rifle, after all. I hope not. I certainly hope not!"

"Will the police give the gun back?" Mrs. Bliss asked. "I'd certainly like to have the gun back."

"The devil with the gun!" I said.

I drove back to Mr. Mannix's and he brought out the green bottle. After a snort of elderberry wine I telephoned the hospital. No change. Then I called Kilarkin.

"Listen, Tremain," he said angrily. "I thought we were stringing together on this. Why send that rifle to Gilogly? That way, all the reporters get a crack at it. I want this exclusive . . . That was the rifle, all right. Gilogly says it's the one that shot your wife."

"Oh, lord!" I said. "The kid's mother hasn't got a dime. That just about shoots the fifteen hundred dollars for Dr. Mostel."

"That's a pretty dukey gun for a poor kid to carry."

"His Uncle Chris in Des Moines sent it to him."

"Well, keep checking direct with me. I'm going to do you a couple favors, so give me what you get exclusively. I'm still trying to find Willard Fee for you."

"What good is Fee now?" I said. "So long."

Mr. Mannix set down his glass of elderberry and said: "I doubt if Artie's Uncle Chris ever sent him a package of gum, let alone an expensive rifle."

"His mother said he got the rifle from his uncle."

"I'll bet she got it from her boy friend. The kid calls her boy friend his uncle. You know what I mean is?"

"Who's her boy friend?"

"A fellow named Varnes."

"Who?"

"Will Varnes. He manages the gun club." Mr. Mannix sipped his elderberry. "Remember Frank Hess wanted Artie to shoot the rifle again? Know why? Hess and me been handling guns for forty, fifty years . . . *And I'll give you odds that kid never shot a gun before today.* Not if he can't hit an oak tree at that distance."

I said: "What do you make of all this?"

"Put it together, son. Gun club members are always giving Varnes busted guns or guns they don't like. It's logical he might give one to Sadie Bliss' boy. But why didn't she say so? You imagine she wants to keep Varnes out of this for some reason?"

"Excuse me," I said. "I'm going to the gun club."

Was Will Varnes the man who had been walking behind Marcy? Neither Sal LoCoco nor Emory Budlong had seen a rifle in the man's hands. Yet Varnes must be a steady traveler of Harm's Way between his home and the gun club.

Perhaps if LoCoco or Emory Budlong saw him it might freshen their memories . . .

Instead of turning toward the club I sent Pagel's truck roaring toward Ninety-third Street. A bus was pulling out for Prothero yards, and I honked and waved until the driver stopped. I ran across the road and asked: "Are you Emory Budlong?"

"I'm Tom Shevlin. Bud is due here in fifteen minutes."

I went into the chuck wagon and looked up Sal LoCoco's number. A woman who spoke with a heavy accent,

perhaps his mother, answered. "Salvatore sleep. He work night shift tonight."

"Wake him up," I said. "Tell him Rex Tremain needs him out on Ninety-third. He'll come."

I waited on the corner until Emory Budlong rolled his big bus to a stop. He was a burly young guy with a thin nose that somebody had bent to the left for him. I introduced myself.

"All I want you to do," I said, "is stop at the gun club and take a look at the manager. Stall him for a drink of water or something. I want to know if he's the guy who was walking behind my wife."

"I doubt if I'll remember him," Budlong said.

"Try it anyway, will you? If you recognize him, step on the brakes a couple times. I'll see the tail lights flashing. If not, just pull ahead."

The shakes were coming back strong as I watched Budlong drive away. I could see his bus stop, I watched him walk down the road to the clubhouse. Then he disappeared. While I waited, Sal LoCoco drove up in his 1941 Chevie with the white adhesive tape signs: VETERANS CAB. He was sleepy-eyed and his hair looked even more like a black strawstack. We shook hands.

Budlong trudged back to his bus and pulled away without flashing his stop lights. He hadn't recognized Varnes.

"O. K., Sal," I said. "Now you."

While he was gone I had a cup of coffee and an aspirin in the chuck wagon. He came in shaking his head. "No use, I didn't notice the guy in the first place . . . But I gave that gun club guy a ride in my cab last night, though."

"Where did you take him?"

"He hailed me right out front here. I drove him over on Military Road. A dollar haul."

"What address?"

"He didn't ask for any address. Just a corner. Military and Bayshore. He said I shouldn't wait."

"Lead me there," I said.

I stayed close on the Chevie's tail across town. LoCoco led me east around the lake, where the big estates started. We climbed out at Military and Bayshore.

"Which way did he walk?" I said.

"He was still standing on the corner when I pulled away."

I walked down Bayshore for one block, just looking around, but the street came to a dead end. Then I came back and tried Bayshore in the opposite direction. Most of the grounds were enclosed by brick walls, with the names of the estates on the gate posts instead of house numbers. Branches extended over the walls, shading the street.

The sign on the gate at the end of the second block read: SANDY POINT. Under it in smaller letters was: Henry J. Albright.

Sal LoCoco was leaning on a fender of the Chevie when I loped back. "Hide the cab," I said. "I've got to make a phone call."

I DROVE Pagel's truck up Military Road until I found a drugstore.

I was afraid of what I was doing. Unsure, excited, not sharp at all. I wished Kilarkin of the *Times* was with me. Even Sergeant Gilogly, the Irish meatball.

I dialed the gun club. When Varnes answered I said guardedly: "This is Albright. Come out to my house right away."

His voice sounded shocked. "But you said I shouldn't come there again!"

"Never mind what I said. Come running. We're in trouble."

I hung up.

Albright and Varnes? What if Varnes was smart enough to check back? What

if he phoned Albright's house or office to make sure the call was on the level? I got scared again . . . To hell with being scared. I needed \$1,500 for Marcy.

I dropped another nickel and called Kilarkin. He said: "Where've you been, Tremain. I've got news for you."

"You located Willard Fee?"

"No. But this news is good . . ."

"Marcy's better?"

"Not yet . . ."

"Then you haven't any good news I want to hear. Listen, maybe I'm in a jam. Meet me at the gun club at four o'clock."

"Tremain! Hey!"

Sal LoCoco had stashed his cab around a corner from Henry Albright's house. I hid the truck and joined him in a shaded driveway.

"What are you doing, Mac?" he asked.

"Shaking."

"I don't know what you're up to, but it's O.K. with me. Maybe I'm psychiatric, or something but . . ." He pulled a .45 automatic out of his shirt front. "Moonlight issue when I was in the army. I carry it in the glove compartment. Want it?"

"Thanks," I said. "I ended up with just a camera."

In the leafy driveway we waited about fifteen minutes. Then a cab pulled up at the gate post of Sandy Point. Will Varnes stepped out, paid the driver and disappeared through the gate. So he hadn't checked back on my call. When the cab drove off I nudged LoCoco and we slipped down the street to the gate.

"How'd you get him out here?" LoCoco asked.

"Fear," I said. "Fear lends intelligence even to fools. My old man was fond of quoting that. Until now I never knew what it meant."

Varnes stayed in the big house less than five minutes. Then he came back

down the walk and turned at the gate, his face redder than ever, sweating and tense.

I stepped out in his path.

"Tremain!" he said.

He tried to dodge me, but LoCoco boxed him against the brick wall. I didn't want to show the .45. I said: "You offered to help. Does that still go?"

Varnes looked at LoCoco, then back to me. He swallowed and said: "Why, sure."

We walked down the shady street and got into LoCoco's Chevie. "There's a drug store up Military," I said. "Stop there first." LoCoco let the cab rocket.

I said to Varnes: "What did you want with Albright?"

He shrugged. "Albright's a member of the gun club. He wanted me to pick up a skeet gun and fix it. A Parker."

"Where is it?"

"The butler couldn't find it."

The lie made me feel good. The shakes almost stopped. I left Varnes in the cab with LoCoco glowering at him and went into the drug store and called Al Rogers.

"Al, you said if there was anything you could do . . . Well, now's the time. Get Mr. Mannix and a few other men and go down on that bridge on the golf course. Don't explain anything to anybody. You'll find a log near the storm shelter. Lug it out on the bridge."

"What's all this?" Al demanded.

"Be there at four o'clock. I'll be up on the road. When I give you the high-sign, heave the log into the swamp. That's all."

It was three-thirty-two when I went back to the cab. We headed back around the lake, riding in silence. Sal LoCoco's moonlight issue .45 lay heavy against my chest. We rode all the way to Ninety-third Street without anybody in the cab saying a word.

Passing the chuck wagon, I saw that it was eight minutes after four. Even before we hit the Flats we noticed the little traffic jam on Harm's Way, a half dozen cars parked on the shoulder and people standing on the causeway, looking down onto the golf course. While we watched through the windshield, a bus coming in from Prothero stopped near the cars and the driver climbed out.

"What's going on?" Varnes said.

LoCoco halted at the spot where Marcy had fallen, and the three of us walked across the road. The red-winged blackbirds were fluttering again, and the faint miasma of the swamp lifted to Harm's Way. Eight or ten men were standing on the bridge, among them Al Rogers and Mr. Mannix, some golfers and caddies and Mr. Stanhope of the golf club. Al had the log braced on the bridge railing.

I caught his eye and lifted a thumb. He strained at the log and it toppled off the railing and hit flat with a splash of mud and green slime. Everybody leaned over the railing and watched the log. In a moment it had sunk out of sight.

Sal LoCoco tripped Varnes as he darted for the Chevvie. One of the watching men on the shoulder ran across the concrete and helped us sit on him. The man was Kilarkin of the *Times*.

"Is this our boy?" Kilarkin said, helping us yank Varnes to his feet.

Varnes said: "What are those guys doing down there?"

"Digging for Willard Fee," I said.

We crammed him into the cab, and LoCoco drove us down the bumpy road to the gun club. Behind us, from the direction of Ninety-third, we could hear a siren whining. We took Varnes down to the rowboat that he had been calking the day before. He looked at us from under his bleached pink eyebrows, listening to the siren.

"You've met Gilogly," I said. "You want him to give you his rooster-look?"

Varnes whimpered: "I didn't do it." He wiped his brick-red face on his sleeve. "Albright was out here shooting Monday night. He cleaned his rifle but he didn't put it back in his locker. He put it in his golf bag. I saw him do it, but he didn't see me."

Kilarkin interrupted: "Henry Albright, Fee's partner?"

Varnes nodded. "I was walking to work yesterday morning behind that girl in the pink hat. I saw Mr. Fee crossing the bridge. Albright was standing in the storm shelter behind him. He took the rifle out of his bag and shot at Mr. Fee. The first shot missed. It hit the girl. She had her head turned and she fell without a sound. Albright didn't even know we were up on the road. He fired again and Mr. Fee tumbled off the bridge into the swamp. He just disappeared."

THE shakes got me so hard that I took LoCoco's .45 out of my shirt and handed it back to him before I did something drastic with it. "I knew I was psychiatric," LoCoco said.

Varnes muttered: "Albright threw the rifle in the swamp. It hit near a stump. Then he took his bag and hustled across the bridge. I jumped off the road and hid in some weeds. I don't know why I did it."

"You know exactly why you did it," I said.

He looked at me sullenly.

"That's Gilogly's siren," I said. "Maybe you'd rather explain the blackmail to him."

Varnes wet his lips. "I laid in the weeds until the ambulance went away. Then I fished around the stump and found the rifle. I cleaned it up and called Albright."

"How much did you ask for?" Kilarkin said.

"Nothing, right away. I just told him I had his rifle and I knew where Mr. Fee was. He told me to keep away from him, he'd see me in a week."

Sal LoCoco said: "You saw him last night, Mac."

Varnes nodded at me. "This milkman started poking around. The cops seemed to quit easy, but his guy had a reason to keep on snooping. I went to Albright last night. He said that if Tremain got hot I should fix it somehow. This morning Tremain told me in the chuck wagon that he was pinning it down to the golf club. So I phoned Albright and we worked out a deal."

"The kid," I said. "Artie Bliss."

"I gave the rifle to Artie," Varnes said. "I had his ma tell him what to do. Albright and I knew that ballistics would prove it was the rifle. So that would be the end of it. They wouldn't do much to the kid. The heat would be off Albright. And I'd be set too."

"But Marcy wouldn't be set," I said.

I slapped Varnes' brick-red face so he'd have to look at me. Then I swung from as far down as I could reach. I packed all my fear and frustration and bitterness into it. It knocked him galley-west over the rowboat. LoCoco cheered.

"Hold him for Gilogly, Sal," I said. "I'm borrowing your hack."

LoCoco took the moonlight issue .45 out of his shirt and watched Varnes pick himself up in the dust. Kilarkin jumped into the cab with me and we headed for the causeway.

Gilogly's squad car, siren muted, bumped down the club's drive and blocked our way. Gilogly leaped out and scrambled into the rear seat of the cab. At his signal, the two cops in the squad car pulled away, toward the gun club and Will Varnes.

The traffic jam in Harm's Way was growing. Men were standing on the shoulder and peering down into the swamp. I bumped and honked through the crowd and sent the cab roaring toward Ninety-third.

Albright would be getting ready to leave his office, natty in his suit of big-shot blue, half limping on his elevator shoes. Pink cheeked and calm outside, scared as a murderer inside . . .

Beside me Kilarkin leaned backward over the seat, talking loud and excitedly above the engine's thrum.

The cab screamed past the chuck wagon, south in Harm's Way. "Albright will keep, boy," Gilogly said. "Don't kill us off in this traffic . . . Did you figure out what he had against Willard Fee?"

I veered across Clybourn and saw headquarters and Emergency ahead. "Who cares?" I said. "Maybe they had business quarrels. Maybe Fee whistled on the greens. Let the dumb cops find out. All I want from Albright is fifteen hundred dollars. For Marcy and for Mostel and for me."

Kilarkin swung around in the seat. "Say! You hung up while I was trying to tell you. I called up Doc Mostel and explained about you. He's flying his own plane up here. Be here this evening."

"But I haven't got the fifteen hundred yet!"

"He doesn't give a damn about the fifteen hundred. Your wife needs an operation and you want him to do it. That's it, period. . . And listen, Mostel had a confab on the phone with the surgeons who know about Marcy's case. He thinks it's going to be O.K."

I wheeled the cab into the circular drive behind Emergency and jumped out. "Hey!" Kilarkin said. "How about Albright?"

"Let the cops take care of Albright," I said.