

^K MANHUNT

WORLD'S BEST SELLING CRIME-FICTION MAGAZINE

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*A Literary
Bombshell*

KEY WITNESS

by FRANK KANE

**EVERY
STORY
NEW!**

Also — JACK RITCHIE • JOHN R. STARR
DAN SONTUP • DEFORBES • C. B. GILFORD

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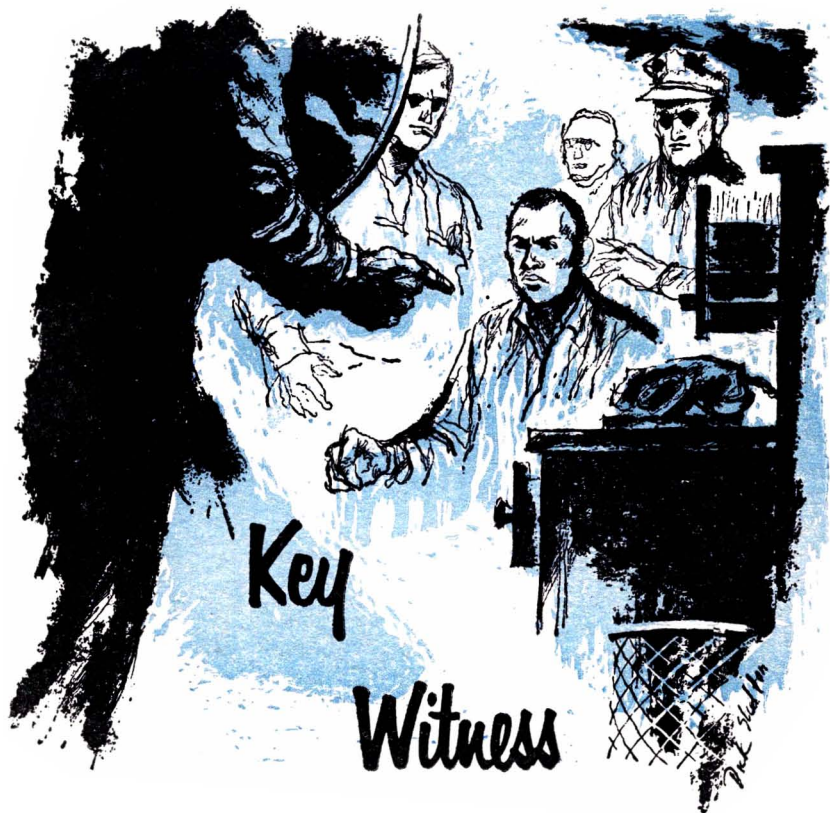
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FRED MORROW stood on the corner of 110th and Park and looked around. It was almost twenty-five years since he had so much as passed through this neighborhood and he marvelled at the changes that time had wrought. The

houses themselves seemed to have degenerated from homes into rabbit warrens. He wrinkled his nose as he thought back to the squalor and filth of the buildings he had just gone through.

The vestibules were filthy, the



A Full-Length Novel

He repeated the words of a dying boy. From that moment on, his life was in jeopardy.

BY FRANK KANE

mailboxes had been pulled from the walls. The walls themselves had been covered with scribbled filth, accompanied in some instances by illustrations. The hallways were permeated with odors of foreign cooking, unwashed humanity and inadequate toilet facilities, odors that would be more appropriate in a dump than in a human habitat. But then, maybe, it wasn't so inappropriate at that. The neighborhood had become a dumping place for human refuse.

He checked his watch, saw that it was almost 4:40. He debated the advisability of flagging down a cab instead of taking the bus. He decided a cab couldn't make any better progress in the stream of cars of all vintages that clogged the narrowed avenue, settled for the bus.

He studied the tide of pedestrians of all colors that ebbed and flowed the length of the avenue.

Suddenly, he had the impression his ears had clogged up. It couldn't be that, because he could still hear the roar of traffic. But it was as if a void, a tangible silence had settled on the street. The tide of walkers seemed to have been stopped, and what was trickling through was diverted around a small group that stood back against the buildings.

A thin, tall boy in a maroon satin jacket, across which was written in bold script "Black Aces" was struggling in the grip of two

other youths, one light complexioned, the other dark, who stood on either side of him each holding an arm. A third stood facing him, his teeth gleaming in a grin.

Morrow had the impression of heavily oiled black hair, a pimply face with a scar that puckered the side of it. The third boy shuffled closer to the one being held by the other two. His arm flashed upward in three strokes, the boy in the maroon jacket reached up to his tiptoes, then seemed to sag in the grip of the two holding him.

When they released his arms, he slumped to the sidewalk, a loose bundle of arms and legs. The three stood over him for a moment, the scar-faced one contemptuously holding the blade of his switch knife for all to see. Then they sprinted for a nearby doorway.

It all happened so quickly, Fred Morrow stood rooted to the spot. By the time he had recovered, the three assailants had vanished, their victim lay squirming on the sidewalk. Morrow pushed his way through the small morbid circle that had formed. The boy lay on his back, his hands laced across his stomach in a futile effort to stem the red flood that was seeping through his fingers. Red-tinged bubbles formed and broke between his lips, as his eyes rolled from side to side.

Morrow went to his knees. "Are you hurt bad, boy?"

The pain-filled eyes stopped rolling. The boy was young, Morrow noticed, light-skinned, probably Puerto Rican. He nodded. "He cut me bad. Real bad."

"There'll be an ambulance along soon." He looked up into the sea of faces around him. "Anybody send for an ambulance?"

The boy groaned, his legs jerked spasmodically. "It was Big Step. He do the cutting. He—" His jaw sagged, a film glazed his eyes. His head rolled loosely to the side, a thin red stream ran from the corner of his mouth. The eyes stared unblinkingly ahead.

Morrow looked up at the crowd that was pushing closer to stare at Death. One of the women was blessing herself; the others just stared in morbid fascination.

"Well, don't just stand there," Morrow thundered at them. "This boy is dead. Get the police."

There was a rustle of movement on the outer perimeter of the crowd, a patrolman pushed his way through. He was tall. His face gleamed with perspiration; he was breathing heavily. "All right, get back. Give the boy some air," he snapped at the crowd. They shuffled back a few inches, inched forward again when he knelt at the side of the dead boy.

"Air won't do him any good now, officer," someone said. "He's dead."

The cop turned the boy's face, examined the sightless eyes, then

nodded. He reached down, caught the cuff of the boy's sleeve between his thumb and forefinger, lifted the hand away from the wound.

Morrow had the feeling he was going to be sick. He stood up, looked away as the cop let the hand fall back.

The cop pushed his cap on the back of his head, tugged a dog-eared leather notebook from his hip pocket. He looked around the crowd. "All right, now. Who saw it happen?" His eyes hopscotched from face to face in the crowd. None spoke. They met his glance blandly, no one stepped forward.

"They did. All of them. They just stood there and let it happen," Morrow protested indignantly.

The cop grunted, wiped his damp forehead with his sleeve. "Not them. They don't see nothing. They don't hear nothing. They don't know nothing." He looked around again. "Anybody know this boy?" Again, the bland silence.

"Well, if they didn't see it, I did," Morrow growled.

The cop rolled his eyes back to Morrow's face, raised his eyebrows, seemed to be seeing him for the first time. Morrow was a few inches shorter than the cop, made up in girth what he lacked in height. He was hatless. His thinning hair was streaked with grey and had receded from his brow, leaving a freckled pate. His face

glinted with perspiration; anger had etched a white ring around his lips.

The cop brought a stub of pencil from his blouse pocket, wet the tip with his tongue. He flipped open the notebook, checked his watch and made a notation. "What was it you saw, mister?"

"There were three of them. Two of them held his hands while the other knifed him." He glared around at the faces that ringed them. "They saw it, too!"

"Three of them, huh?" The cop transferred the information to his notebook, looked up. "You don't live around here?"

Morrow shook his head.

"Then you wouldn't know who they were."

"One of them was Big Step. That's what the boy said before he died."

The cop drew his breath through his teeth, studied Morrow for a moment. "You're sure of that, mister?" Behind them the crowd started shuffling, muttering under its breath.

"Of course I'm sure. I was kneeling right alongside of him. He said it was Big Step who cut him."

The cop shrugged. "I'll have to have your name and address."

"Fred Morrow. 453 East Seventh Street, Brooklyn." He watched while the officer noted it in his book. "I was down looking over some houses a client of my firm

owns. I was waiting here for the bus when it happened." He pointed to a doorway. "They ran in there after they killed him."

The cop wasted an incurious glance on the doorway. "That don't mean anything. They could go in there and come out a block away." He returned to his notes. "You're sure he said Big Step. You see the guy who used the knife?"

"Yes. He was facing me. He was young, sixteen or seventeen, dark. Had a scar alongside his mouth. Right about here." He touched his index finger to his cheek.

The cop looked up, nodded. Somewhere a siren moaned.

The cop flicked his notebook closed. "That'll be the Dolly Sisters," he grunted. "You better let them take you down to the house. The D.A. will probably want one of his boys to hear your story. Unless you change your mind."

"Why should I change my mind?"

The cop shrugged. "It's been known to happen."

A patrol car skidded to a stop at the curb, the crowd parted to make room for the newcomer. He was young, redheaded. He nodded to the other patrolman, glanced down at the body.

"There's a call in for the Harlem Hospital bus."

The other cop grunted. "Too late. This is a DOA."

The newcomer pursed his lips. "Too late to stop the bus now." His eyes flicked to Morrow. "Got anything on it?"

"Man here says he saw it happen." The first cop opened his book, flipped through the pages. "Was standing right here when it happened. Says the victim told him who did the cutting." His eyes rolled up from the book. "Big Step."

The redheaded cop raised his eyebrows, offered no comment.

"I think you'd beter have Dinty run him down to the house. The D.A.'s office will probably want to talk to him," the beat cop suggested.

"Okay." The redhead nodded for Morrow to follow him, pushed his way through the crowd. The faces that were turned to Morrow were sullen, unfriendly. They made no move to get out of his way, forced him to push his way through.

"It's a DOA," the redheaded cop told his partner. "Man here was a witness. Says he got the killer's name from the dead kid before he went out." He looked at Morrow. "He's willing to testify to it. That right, mister?"

Morrow nodded. "That's right.

The driver of the car shifted the toothpick he was chewing from the left side of his mouth to the right. "What name'd he give you, mister?"

"Big Step," Morrow told him.

He watched the glance that passed between the two cops.

One of them said, "These spics've been spoiling for a real rumble and now they've got a good excuse."

The driver nodded, motioned Morrow into the car. "I'd better fill the skipper in. He may want to move some extra men in to break it up before they start chopping each other up. Not that it would be any great loss."

The redhead nodded, slammed the door behind Morrow. "I'll hold it down until you get back."

"Okay." The driver touched his siren, swung out into a hole in the traffic and headed downtown.

2.

Sol Robbins had been an ambitious, bright young boy just out of law school when he was tapped for the district attorney's staff. He envisioned a skyrocketing rise to prominence on the wings of publicity. Unfortunately, the only cases that had come his way had been routine, lacking in color or importance sufficient to warrant notice.

So—when he drew this case, he was determined to squeeze the last drop of publicity out of it.

Fred Morrow was sitting in a small cubbyhole office just off the squad room of the precinct house when Robbins arrived. The Assistant D.A. swung through the

squad room, waved a salute to a man he knew, walked into the office.

He shoved a moist, pudgy hand at Morrow. "I hope I didn't keep you waiting too long," he panted. "I got down here as soon as I got the flash."

Morrow nodded, swabbed at his moist face with a balled-up handkerchief. "I don't think there was any necessity for you to come all the way uptown, Mr—"

"Robbins. Sol Robbins." He walked around the desk, dropped into the chair. "Think nothing of it. I wanted to meet you personally." He picked up four sheets of typewritten paper, flicked through them, nodded his satisfaction at the signature on the fourth sheet. "They've got your statement all typed up, I see. Good. I can study it at my leisure. First, I'd like to hear the story from you first hand." He leaned back, tugged two cigars from his breast pocket, held one up to Morrow, drew a shake of the head. He bit the end off one, returned the other to his pocket. "Now, as I understand it, the dead boy—his name was Julio Rigas, incidentally—identified his killer to you?"

Morrow nodded. "He told me Big Step had knifed him."

Sol Robbins smiled, rolled the unlit cigar between thumb and forefinger in the middle of his lips. "You also saw the killer well enough to be able to identify him?"

"He was facing me when he stabbed the other boy. I wouldn't be very likely to forget his face."

"Very good, sir." The Assistant D.A. beamed his approval. "I want you to know that we all owe you a debt of gratitude for your public spiritedness in being willing to testify." He chewed on the cigar for a moment. "Do you have a family, Mr. Morrow?"

Morrow nodded. "A boy and a girl."

"We'll see to it that they have all the protection necessary until this matter is taken care of."

"Protection?" Morrow was uncomfortably aware of a cold finger of apprehension. "From what?"

Sol Robbins shrugged. "Just a routine gesture. Sometimes in a case like this, pressure is exerted to make a witness change his mind about testifying. We'll see to it that you're not bothered."

Morrow swabbed at his face again. "Maybe I ought to—"

Sol Robbins pulled the cigar from between his teeth. "There's only one way we can lick this lawlessness and that's for a few of us to be willing to stand up and fight." His eyes moved up from the cigar to the other man's face. "We can't afford to let ourselves be intimidated. All of us have got to be willing to make some sacrifice to make this city a safe place to live in. Am I right?"

Morrow nodded uncertainly. "I—I guess so, but—"

The man behind the desk pounded the desk with the flat of his hand. "Good. Then we'll depend on you." He replaced the cigar between his teeth, and chewed on it. "There are a couple of newspaper boys outside, I understand. I'd like you to meet them with me. All right?"

Morrow nodded. "I guess so."

The man behind the desk picked up the phone, pressed a button on its base. "Sergeant, you can let the press in now." He dropped the instrument back on its cradle, leaned back and laced his fingers at the back of his head. "If it's all right with you, I'll do the talking. I'm used to handling these boys."

Morrow nodded again, swabbed at his face.

The "boys" consisted of two wire service police reporters, a mannish looking female from the Standard and a scholarly looking young man in horn-rimmed glasses from the Advance. They filed into the room, nodded to Robbins and studied Morrow curiously.

"I've just finished interviewing Mr. Morrow, gentlemen—and ladies," he hastily amended. "We have a positive identification of the killer of Julio Rigas. The dead boy whispered his name to Mr. Morrow practically with his dying breath."

The mannish looking female fastened an embarrassingly direct stare on Fred Morrow. "I under-

stand he was knifed three times through the stomach and hemorrhaged from the mouth. Yet he was able to tell you who killed him?"

"That's right," Robbins snapped.

"What's the matter with him? Can't he talk?"

Robbins colored slightly, started to retort, dug his teeth deeper into his cigar instead. He worked at a smile which didn't come off. "Of course." He turned to Morrow. "This is Fanny Lewis of the Standard, Mr. Morrow."

She turned back to Morrow. "Well?"

"I heard him, I saw the killer. He was a Negro. And I saw the two who held the boy for the killer."

"Even though you may not like our black brethren," the woman said, "you wouldn't deliberately swear one into the electric chair, would you?"

"Of course not," Morrow protested quickly. "I've got nothing against colored people."

Robbins gave Morrow an understanding smile. Then said, "We're all aware the Standard has very set editorial opinions maintaining that the District Attorney's office, the police department and practically everybody but the Standard discriminates against the Negro. Nonetheless, the fact remains that Mr. Morrow is performing a public service in cooperating with the police department in this matter and is deserv-

ing of more courtesy than is implied by Mrs. Lewis' question."

Fanny Lewis waited patiently until he finished, then, without giving any sign that she had heard, said to Morrow, "May I ask what you were doing in that part of town?"

"I was there on business."

The woman pursed her unpainted lips. "Oh, you don't mind doing business with them?"

"What do you mean, *them*?"

One of my firm's clients owns some property up there. I was looking it over for him."

"Pretty picture, wasn't it?" She fished a pencil and some folded copy paper from her bag. "What did you say your firm's name was?"

"I didn't say. And I don't intend to."

Fanny Lewis smiled at him sweetly. "We can find out, you know."

The AP man, a gray-haired veteran named Kiely grinned at Morrow. "Don't mind Fanny, Mr. Morrow. She sees an anti-Harlem plot in every thing that happens in or close to Harlem."

"You stay out of it, Kiely," the woman snapped at him. "You know damn well what they're trying to pull. The cops and the D.A.'s office have been getting hell about all these gang killings, so they've got to produce a killer. They get a guy who heard what was probably death rattles, put a name in

his mouth until he thinks he heard it. So Harlem gets a bad name because it happened there."

"You try printing something like that, my friend, and you and your paper are going to find yourselves mixed up in the Goddamnedest lawsuit you ever ran into," Robbins roared at her. "I'm sick and tired of the way you start bleeding every time there's some trouble in Harlem. Talk about slanting evidence, you slant it so far it's almost on its back. This man doesn't care whether Big Step is white or black or in-between, merely that his—"

"Next election they might like to know that your boss appoints assistants who are violently prejudiced against the people whose skins—"

"Print whatever you like, but these are the facts. Three races mingle on the fringe of that area. Maybe four races—who knows how many. Today a young Puerto Rican was knifed to death on a crowded street. The police believe the knifing was the result of ill feeling between two gangs, the Black Aces and the Royal Knights. The dead boy was the war counselor for the Black Aces and the police expect to announce at any moment the arrest of the killer who is believed to be a high ranking member of the Royal Knights." Robbins' eyes moved from face to face. "Mr. Morrow happened to be an eye witness to the killing, ran to the

aid of the knifed boy and was told by him the name of the killer. He was also able to describe the killer to the police. Any questions?"

Fanny Lewis grinned at him. "No names?"

Robbins ignored her and spoke to the group. "Please no. Not at least until the arrest has been made. I've given Mr. Morrow my word on that. Any other questions?"

"A killing like this could start a real all-out rumble. Are the police doing anything to control it?" the scholarly-looking man from the Advance wanted to know.

"I understand additional men are being assigned to the area, and the foot men are being equipped with helmets. The precinct captain assures me that every possible step is being taken to avoid any violence. We feel confident that as soon as the arrest is made, the feeling will die down."

"Why all the secrecy, Robby?" Fanny Lewis wanted to know.

"Because my office feels that a witness as important as Mr. Morrow should get all the protection we can give him."

The sinking feeling of apprehension was heavy again in Morrow's stomach. "Look, I'm not looking for any trouble. I saw a boy killed today and I thought it was my duty as a citizen to try and have his killer caught. I'm beginning to feel like I was the killer."

"You could be—if you finger an innocent man into the electric chair," Fanny Lewis snapped.

3.

The rooftop was dark. Big Step sat with his back against the parapet, his legs stretched out in front of him. The girl lay with her head in his lap, with only the occasional gleam of white teeth to betray her presence.

His hand idly fondled her bare, hard nipples. His mind was back to the afternoon. He was reliving the three sharp thrusts that had elevated him to top dog in the Royal Knights.

"You sure are mean," the girl purred. She took his hand from her breast, gnawed at the knuckle. "You sure cut that boy for good."

Big Step grinned. "He like to die before I even cut him." He caught her by the back of the neck, pulled her mouth up against him.

Her arms were around his neck, her fingers digging into his shoulders. The door to the roof swung open. A triangle of yellow light spilled out onto the roof, spread to where they sat locked together. Big Step pushed the girl away, his hand flashed for his pocket, came out with the bare blade of the switch knife.

A figure stood framed in the doorway. "Big Step," it whispered hoarsely. "You out here?"

"Who that?" Big Step's voice was low, harsh.

The figure in the doorway shuffled out onto the roof. "Me. Stud. Where you at?"

"Over here," Big Step growled. "How come you go busting in on me and Ruby, Stud? How come?"

"Trouble. Big Trouble." Stud stopped in front of where Ruby sat, stared at her for a moment. He was tall, thin. His clothes seemed sizes too big, hung loosely from his shoulders. "Cops come looking for you."

Big Step chuckled. "Cops always come looking for Big Step."

"It in the papers. A guy seen you."

"A hundred seen me. Everybody knows who did it. But them cops, they can't prove nothing."

Stud shook his head. "They got an ofay who talked. He tell the cops he seen you. He tell the cops the spic finger you before he die."

The girl caught Big Step's hand. "Make him go away, Big Step."

Big Step pulled his hand loose. "Who this guy that talked? Where he live?"

Stud shook his head. "It don't say."

Big Step raked his fingers through his hair. "You stayed there, Ruby. You seen who might finger me?"

The light highlighted the girl's tip-tilted breasts, the long, graceful legs, the softly curved thighs. Stud watched her hungrily as she tried

to put her arms around Big Step, got pushed away.

"There was a man," she said. "He go away with the cops."

"We got to find him. We got to let him know what happens if'n he fingers Big Step. How we going to find him, Stud?"

Stud scratched his head.

Ruby said, "The cop know. He take his name and address down in his book. Why don't you ask him?"

Big Step stared at her for a moment, then his wide mouth split in a grin. "Which cop?"

"Hurley." She grinned maliciously. "You go ask Hurley, he crack your head."

Big Step scowled at the girl. "You mean that cop all the time sniffing round Mae's place?"

Ruby nodded. "He like her girls. She let him do more'n sniff around and he don' bother her business none."

Patrolman Everett Hurley (Badge 16462) stood in the shadows of a store front, cupped his cigarette in the palm of his hand. He smoked surreptitiously, flicked the butt toward the gutter. He straightened his cap over his eyes, buttoned the top button of his blouse. His wristwatch showed the time to be 10:50, with a little over an hour left to his tour.

He watched the thinned stream of people out walking, scanned the front stoops loaded with sweating

humanity. Across the street, a girl caught his eye. Her hair was cut in a provocative Italian gamin cut. When she walked, her full breasts strained against the thin fabric of her dress. As she passed the street light, he stared hungrily at the slow, languorous working of her hips against her skirt. He could tell from where he stood that she wore nothing under the dress.

He ambled down his side of the street, slightly to the rear of her. Near the corner, when she crossed the street, she almost ran into him.

"Hello." Her lips were thick, soft looking. Her teeth were even and white against the blackness of her skin. Her eyes were black and moist.

"What are you doing out alone?" Hurley wanted to know. He made no attempt to hide the fact that his eyes were taking inventory of her assets. "A pretty girl like you ought to be out on a date this time of night."

The smile faded, the girl pouted. "I got no man no more. We just bust up for good." She turned the full power of her eyes on him. "Besides he a runt. I like my men big and strong."

Hurley eyed her speculatively. "I'm a working man. And when I quit working I've got to go straight home."

Ruby pouted again. "That too bad. I don't like sitting on that roof alone. I get scared of the

dark. And there ain't nobody come on that roof."

"What roof is that?"

"Down the street. Four house from the corner. Ain't nobody come on that roof a'tall." She grinned at him, swung away, walked down the street swinging her hips with an exaggerated motion.

Hurley stood watching hungrily until she disappeared into the entrance to the fourth house from the corner. He knew why no one ever went on that roof. The house had been condemned, its occupants forcibly moved out. In a matter of days wreckers would be tearing it down.

Slowly he walked down the block. When he came abreast of the fourth house from the corner, he stopped, looked casually around. Certainly, if a house were condemned, it was his duty to investigate who might be trespassing. He tried the door, found it unlocked. Inside, the vestibule was dark, redolent with nose-offending odors. The door to the hallway hung crazily from one hinge, half open. He walked in, felt his way cautiously to the stairs.

He was just about to test the first step, when an arm encircled his throat, cut off his wind. Two other arms pinned his arms to his side.

The first blow knocked his hat off, started bells ringing. He struggled feebly, was dimly aware

that the second blow had hammered him to his knees. The arm around his throat seemed to tighten; he could feel the perspiration break out in little bubbles on his forehead. Suddenly, there was a bright flash in the back of his head; his body went limp; he hit the floor face first.

The unconscious man didn't even feel it when Big Step brought back his foot and kicked him in the side of the head. From the cop's back pocket, Stud pulled the leather memo pad. Sam, who got down beside Stud, tugged away at the gun in the holster, couldn't get it loose.

"I want me this iron," Sam panted. "Then when them Black Aces come rumbling, bang-bang, they think I'm a cannon." He tugged again. "How come them cops let their gun get stuck?"

"That not stuck," Big Step growled. He reached over, stuck his thumb into the holster, eased the gun out. "That a special catch so's you can't steal no cop's gun."

Hurley moaned softly on the floor. Big Step lashed out again with the toe of his shoe. The moaning stopped.

"Let's get out of here," Big Step said.

4.

It was cool on the porch in Brooklyn. Fred Morrow sat in an old wicker armchair, sucked on

his pet pipe as he finished telling his story. His wife, Ann, prematurely grey, and comfortably fat, had stopped rocking.

"I just happened to see the boy killed," he concluded, "and I saw the one who did it. That's all."

"They'll be after you," she said. "You read every day what they do." Her voice was concerned.

"They don't know my name or anything." Fred knocked the dottle from his pipe, dug a pouch from his hip pocket. He dipped the bowl in, started packing with his index finger. "What could I do? I couldn't just stand by and let the killer get away with murder."

"They'll find your name. It wasn't your affair, Fred. Why should you get mixed up in it, and have them come looking for you? How about Gloria or Freddy? Maybe they'll take it out on them!"

"Stop worrying, Ann." He stuck the pipe between his teeth, scratched a wooden match. "The police will see to it that we're not bothered."

"The police!" She ran her fingers nervously through her hair. "Can they be with us every step? They've got other things on their minds."

Morrow touched the match to the tobacco, sucked a mouth full of smoke, exhaled noisily. "Look, Ann, you're always saying something should be done about all the killing and the maiming these teen-age gangs are doing. Right?"

"Yes, but not by you. That's what the police are for."

"The police are handcuffed unless the public helps. We've got to make an example of one of these killers and maybe the others will think twice." He ground his teeth on the pipestem. "It's not a pleasant thing to do, but it's my duty to do it, and I have to."

"But how about me and the kids? Is it fair to us to get a gang of murderers after us because you feel you have to do your duty? You weren't the only one on the street when it happened. Why didn't someone else step up and identify the killer? Why you?"

Morrow shrugged helplessly. "I don't know, Ann. Just because they don't doesn't say I shouldn't. The sooner these kids find out they're not beyond the law, the sooner decent people like you and me won't have to be afraid to stand up for their rights."

The woman dry washed her hands agitatedly. "I know, I know. But I can't help worrying. I wish you hadn't done it. I wish it hadn't been you."

"It's too late to wish now. I've already signed a statement giving the boy's name and his description. When they pick him up, I'll have to identify him." He blew a stream of murky white smoke at the ceiling. "They'll put him away where he can't do anybody any more harm."

"But he has friends. Those hood-

lums travel in packs. You know that. His friends won't let you rest if you're the cause of him going to jail."

"Please, Ann. There's just no sense in arguing with me. It's too late to turn back now."

"You can refuse to identify him. Say you're not sure."

"And let him know we're knocking down to him? Let him laugh at law and order with blood fresh on his hands?"

"What's the difference? At least they'll leave us alone. You can't bring the other boy back by sending this one to jail."

"Maybe not, but maybe we can save some other boy from getting what he got. Maybe our own boy. When they get so bold that they can commit a murder on a crowded street with no fear of being identified, then it's time we did something about it."

"But why do you have to elect yourself the hero? Don't you ever think of us, what will happen to us if anything happens to you?" She covered her eyes with her hand, fought back a sob. "Why did you have to get mixed up in it at all? Why?"

A wave of helplessness surged over him as he watched her shoulders heaving. He swore softly under his breath, got up from his chair, slid his arm around her shoulder.

"It'll be all right, Ann. You'll see. It'll be all right."

Later that night he lay in bed, stared at the dim smear of the ceiling above him. He was aware that in the other bed Ann too lay wide-eyed and sleepless. Both pretended to be sleeping.

The phone on the night table shrilled.

Morrow got up on his elbow, pulled on the night table lamp. The little clock on the stand showed two o'clock. He stared at the phone with a frown, looked over to where Ann lay, a knuckle between her teeth.

The phone continued to shrill.

"You'd better answer it. It'll wake the kids," she told him finally.

Morrow pulled the receiver off its hook. He held it to his ear.

"Hello?"

The voice on the other end was low, muffled. "Hello, Big Mouth."

"Who is this?" Morrow tried to keep the fear out of his voice. "Who do you want?"

"You, Big Mouth. I want you and I'm goin' get you. Good night, Big Mouth. Sleep tight."

The receiver clicked in his ear. Morrow tapped on the crossbar of the phone. "Hello, hello."

The metallic voice of the operator cut in. "What number are you calling?"

"Operator, I just got a phone call. Can you trace it for me? I want the party back. Please."

"I'm sorry. I must have the number."

"I see. All right. Thanks." He dropped the receiver back on its hook.

Ann had swung her feet from under the covers, sat on the side of her bed. The color had drained from her face, leaving it white and old. "It was them?"

He nodded.

"I knew it." There was resignation in her voice, an acceptance of what lay in store. "You thought they didn't know where to find you, but it didn't take them long. I knew it wouldn't."

"But how?" He shook his head bewilderedly. "The police promised. They said they'd protect us, that—"

Ann got up, walked to the window, looked out on the quiet Brooklyn Street below their window. She pulled the shade. "They might be out there right now. I told you they wouldn't let you do it. They'll never let us alone." She slid her feet into slippers, pulled a robe around her. He could hear the slippered feet slithering down the hall to the boy's room.

After what seemed a long time, she was back. She sat wearily on the side of her bed. "What are you going to do, Fred?"

He shook his head, sank his face into his hands. "I have to go ahead with it, Ann. You know that. I can't turn back now."

The second call came at three o'clock, the third at four.

After he hung up for the third

time, Fred Morrow dialed the telephone of Police Headquarters. He was routed through to the Detective Bureau of the East Harlem Division.

"Torno, speaking. Detective Bureau."

"This is Fred Morrow. I—I'm the witness in the killing of that boy in Harlem this afternoon."

There was a slight pause at the other end. "What can we do for you?"

"You've got to protect me. They've been calling me. Every hour on the hour. They've been threatening my wife and me, and my kids. You've got to protect us."

"Take it easy, Mr. Morrow. It may just be cranks."

Morrow shook his head. "It isn't. They mean business. They said they'll kill all of us. You promised they wouldn't get to me. You promised—"

The voice on the other end was soothing. "We didn't give out anything. It's probably somebody who knows you who thinks it's a real funny joke to throw a scare into you."

"They meant business."

A note of impatience came into the other voice. "How could they? You didn't give anything to anybody, did you?"

Morrow investigated the fine bristle along the point of his chin with the tips of his fingers. "No. I don't think—wait a minute, yes I did. That first cop where it hap-

pened—he took my name and address. Before he sent me to the precinct station. Yes. I remember now. He wrote it down."

"I see. Well, you get some sleep. I'll see to it that a guard is assigned to you and your family. Just get some sleep, we'll keep an eye on you."

"Thanks." He dropped the receiver back on the hook, walked over to the drawn shade on the window. He pulled it back, applied an eye to the side. The street was empty.

Ann sat on the side of the bed, speechless, white. She followed him with stricken eyes. "What did he say?"

"They'll give us protection."

She laughed bitterly. "They'll give us protection? How? Can they spend every minute with us? Can they sleep with us? Can they stop that phone from ringing?"

Morrow shook his head helplessly, dropped into a chair and stared at the clock. He was still staring at it when the hands showed five o'clock.

The telephone rang.

5.

Detective First Grade Marty Torno dropped his receiver back on its hook, glanced around the half empty bull pen, signalled down his partner. Torno was young, rangy. His face was sunburned a deep mahogany and when he

smiled, dimples cut deep white trenches in the tan. He picked up a report he was working on, dropped it into his top drawer.

His partner, Al Doyle, was an old timer. He affected a rumpled blue suit, a battered and stained gray fedora. An ever-present wad of chewing gum kept his jaws in perpetual motion. He had the long nose and inquisitive eyes of a real ferret. He ambled across the room in a flat-footed stride that bespoke many years of pounding the pavement before some spectacular police work had brought him into the Bureau.

"What's the squeal?" he wanted to know.

Torno stared up at him, frowned. "The guy who turned up as a witness in the knifing this afternoon. They're bothering him with phone calls."

"Cranks."

Torno shook his head. "He don't think so."

The man in the blue suit shrugged. "They never do. Some screwball gets their name and address—"

"It wasn't given out."

Doyle stared at his partner's face. "If they didn't give out the address, how would the mob find it?"

"You know Hurley, the cop that got himself mugged just before midnight? He was the cop on the beat where it happened."

Doyle pursed his lips, squeezed at his nostrils with thumb and fore-

finger. "He take the guy's name and address?"

Torno nodded. He picked up the phone, dialed a number. "Hello? Torno at the Detective Bureau. Put me through to the Property Clerk." While he waited he drummed on the edge of the desk, stared up at his partner. Then, "Torno, Lou. You got the stuff they took off the cop that got jumped on 110th?" He nodded. "His gun. Anything else?" He stared up at Doyle significantly, nodded. "Thanks, Lou." He dropped the receiver on its hook. "Two things missing, Al. His gun and his book—the book with the guy's name and address."

"What are you going to do?"

"Who's handling from the D.A.'s office?"

Doyle wrinkled his nose, shook his head. "It'll be on the sheet." He walked back to the little cubbyhole partitioned off for the lieutenant in charge. After a moment, he came out fingering a flimsy, walked back with it to Torno's desk. "Robby's got it. Sol Robbins." He flipped the report on the desk in front of his partner. "Now what?"

"I'll call Robby and tell him if he wants that witness delivered in court in one piece he better set up around-the-clock protection."

Doyle consulted his watch. "At this hour? You know what time it is?"

Torno grinned at him. "We're awake. Why should Robby sleep?"

In a few minutes he was out-

lining what had happened to a very sleepy assistant district attorney. When he explained how the address had gotten into Big Step's hands, Robby came wide awake.

"Thanks, Torno. I'll get in touch with downtown and have Morrow covered until we can lay our hands on Big Step."

Torno grinned at the mouth-piece glumly. "And then what happens?"

"What can we do? Put a guard on Morrow for the rest of his life?"

Torno dropped the receiver back on its hook. "What do you say we do a little calling, Al?"

"Any place in particular?"

Torno shrugged. "Just calling."

110th Street is a street that never goes to bed. The stream of strollers of early evening was now a dribble, but still there were continuous signs of life. Al Doyle drove the black department car slowly down the length of the street, his sharp little eyes flickering from side to side.

Tired little Puerto Rican girls shuffled their way homeward after a long hard night, their brightly colored clothes and heavy make-up scarecrowish in the early morning light. Finally, Doyle spotted a familiar figure, nudged his partner. The big car slid to an easy stop at the curb, near a man who stood leaning against a store front.

"Hey, Sugar," Doyle called softly.

The man in the shadows stif-

fened, seemed undecided whether or not to run.

"Come here, Sugar," Doyle called him. "I just want to talk to you."

The figure emerged from the shadows. He was short, fat. His black face shone in the light, he shuffled rather than walked.

"You hadn't ought to do this, Mr. Doyle," he complained. "It gives me a bad name they see me talking to a cop. You hadn't ought to do it."

Doyle pushed open the back door to the car. "Get in."

The black man's eyes rolled white. "I ain't done nothin', Mr. Doyle. You know that. I'm yoah frien'l. I ain't done nothin'."

"Get in. I want to talk to you."

The fat man slid into the back seat, got down low as the car picked up speed, headed west.

"I swear I clean, Mr. Doyle," Sugar protested. "I ain't done a thing."

"You hear about Hurley tonight?"

Sugar sucked a whistling breath through his teeth. "I don't know nothin'."

"Look, Sugar, we been pretty good to you. We let you operate a little bit. We never blow the whistle to the Feds on that powder you push. That right?" Torno swung around in his seat. "You want us to keep on being good to you?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Torno. Yes, sir. I sure do." He wiped the wet smear

of his lips with his sleeve. "But I'm tellin' it true. I don't know nothin' about Hurley."

Torno studied the man's face for a minute. "Where does Big Step hang out?"

The man in the back seat shook his head so vigorously, the jowls shook. "I don't know. Word o'God, I don't know."

"You better start levelling, Sugar. We know Big Step and the rest of his gang are hooked. And you're their source. Where does he pad down?"

Sugar continued to shake his head. "Not me, Mr. Torno. I take care of maybe a couple little girls who real dead beat after a hard night. Not them boys. No, sir, Mr. Torno. They real mean."

"Who's their source, Sugar?"

Sugar licked at his lips with a thick, fat tongue. His eyes flicked from one side of the car to the other, finally came to rest on Torno's face. "You'll protect me, Mr. Torno?"

"Sure," Torno grinned. "We wouldn't want anything to happen to you, Sugar. Would we, Al?"

"Where would we get our information?" Doyle said.

"You know Cozy Jacks?"

Torno nodded. "Guy runs the pool room over on Lexington?"

"That's the guy, Mr. Torno. He got a real shooting gallery back there. He got a real big high power trade, not a chicken push like poor Sugar."

"Big Step hang out there?"

Sugar wiped the streaming perspiration from his forehead and upper lip. "If'n Cozy ever heard who tipped you, I be a dead cat before morning."

"He won't know. Maybe with him out of business you can spread out."

"Thank you, Mr. Torno."

Torno nodded toward the curb. "We'll drop you here, Sugar."

The car pulled up to the curb, the rear door opened and the fat man scurried out. He headed for the building line, melted into the shadows. He waited there until the tail light of the sedan had blinked around the far corner. Then he started shuffling back to his regular stand.

6.

Fanny Lewis had no illusions about herself. She knew she was only a fair to middling reporter who drew the Harlem beat because she was tagged as a "bleeding heart nigger-lover" by the rest of the staff. She didn't resent it, because everybody on the staff who was anybody was a bleeding heart for some minority.

The Standard had once been an important paper in New York. Hidebound, ultra conservative, but important. But it never survived World War I and the revolution in morals and social customs. It staggered along during the late Twen-

ties and early Thirties, a dreary ghost of its once important self. Little by little the tight little band of ultra conservatives who were its *raison d'être* died off leaving it with no support.

Then the business department started to scream. As revenue dropped off, so did the good staffers who could draw better pay elsewhere. And the Standard went on the block.

The new owners were faced with the dreary fact that there was no longer any reason for being for the Standard. The conservatives were ably represented by two papers, the liberals by two more and the middle of the readers by still another. Advertisers could see no reason to stretch their too thin budgets to support still another.

But necessity is often the mother of inspiration. When Carleton Morris took over the Standard, he did it with the cold-blooded purpose of establishing himself and his wife as important figures in New York life. The project was an abject failure and he bowed out of active operation of the paper, turning it over to Leslie Hunt, his managing editor and former classmate, to be run as he saw fit.

It was then that inspiration entered the picture. Hunt decided to make his paper the mouthpiece and defender of minority groups, to such an extent it would make it seem the other papers bent over in maligning them. Fact was not

important to Hunt. Whatever viewpoint the other papers took, The Standard took the other, whether it be defense or villification. The Negro was Leslie Hunt's best bet to attract attention. Particularly, with the desegregation uproar now headlining the news.

At first it had been a sorry experiment, but as months went by, the department stores and advertisers who had stayed away from the Standard in droves started to discover that the minorities not only had money to spend, but were rabid about supporting the paper that fought their battle so one-sidedly.

So, the outcasts and the Fifth Amendment fringe of journalism started to drift toward the one paper whose policy they could adopt. Fanny Lewis was the forefront of this contingent.

No person working for The Standard, no matter what mud they previously helped mould into the printed word, so epitomized the rabble-rousing sheet as Fanny. She *was* the paper. Fanny had been born in New Orleans of a mother who was part Spanish and part Negro and of a white father who deserted them when the third child arrived. Fanny was as Caucasian-looking as her father and perhaps that's why she hated him, and felt so sorry for herself and her mother. She never permitted herself to question what her feelings might have been had her mother disap-

peared. A big, homely, raw-boned, lonely woman lost between two worlds, she found herself vehemently forced to take the side of one or the other. When Hunt hired her, she knew she had found what she'd been seeking for nearly forty years.

Fanny was getting ready for bed when the desk called her.

"Better get on down to the hospital," the night editor on the city side grunted. "Cop on the beat at 110th got half his brains kicked out in an empty hallway."

She nodded, dropped the receiver on its hook, started to dress. She looked around the dingy flat dispiritedly, her eyes came to rest on the clock on the dresser. Almost one o'clock and Benjy hadn't even bothered to call.

She walked into the bathroom, dashed cold water into her face, examined herself in the mirror. She tucked a wisp of hair back over her ear with her finger, stared at the drawn, angular features that glared back at her.

The only reason he had married her was because she could support him. She knew that and everyone else knew it. And now all he did was use her money to spend on other women, every kind of woman. She wondered why she didn't leave him, why she didn't walk out and go back to living by herself.

The sound of a key in a lock brought her out of the bathroom.

She rushed to the door, pulled it open. At least he was home!

Benjy Lewis was tall, broad-shouldered, very good-looking and nattily dressed. He was ebony-skinned, his teeth square and white. Tonight his eyes were sunken behind black puffy sacs, bloodshot and watery. His nose was flat, broad at the base; his lips were thick and loose.

He stared down at his wife's street dress, pushed her aside and closed the door after him. "Where you think you going, this hour o'night?"

"I just got a call from the paper, Benjy. I've got to go out on a story."

He walked over to a chair, dropped into it. "I need some money."

She stared at him. "More money? But Benjy—"

"I said I need more money." He pulled himself out of the chair, walked over and caught her by the shoulder. "Where you got it?"

She winced as the thick fingers dug into her shoulder. "I don't have any more money, Benjy. Honest, I don't."

He pushed her back roughly, picked her bag up from the table, rummaged through it. He came up with a few crumpled dollar bills. "Where's the rest?"

She shook her head. "That's all there is." She walked to the table, started putting back the contents of the bag. "What'd you do with the money I gave you tonight?"

He grinned at her. "I been spendin' it, Sugar."

She wrinkled her nose at the strong smell of gin on his breath, the smear of lipstick on his collar. "Who on?"

He didn't answer, made for the door. He looked back at her. "You better start getting more money, Sugar. A lot more. I can't hardly get by on what you bring home."

She started to protest; he waved her to silence.

"You can't afford me, they's lots of women can. Get that money."

He slammed the door behind him. She could hear him stamping down the stairs. She stared dry-eyed at the closed door for a moment, then followed him.

The door across the hall was open, a heavysset Negro woman stood in the doorway grinning at her. She knew. Everybody knew. The only way Fanny could keep him was to buy him. And they despised her almost as much as she despised herself.

On the bus, she saw the whole thing again, felt it as she always would feel it.

Elvira was a beautiful colored show-girl. Benjy had been Elvira's friend. Fanny met him for the first time one night years ago. She was overwhelmed by his good looks, his broad shoulders, by his animal magnetism. A man like this and Elvira, she thought, belong together. They look so *right* together. But by the end of the

evening Fanny had learned that Benjy couldn't afford Elvira. And Benjy saw something he could use.

She married him because she had never had a man and needed one and knew she should have one. She had no regrets in her initiation to sex. Benjy was all that he seemed to be, and more. But he was what he was, and there were no illusions left by now. All that remained, and in themselves they were sufficient, were the occasional nights when Benjy remembered he was her husband. It came as no shock tonight to realize that the way things had been going lately she would have to bid still higher to keep him.

She got off the bus, headed up the long flight of stairs to the hospital entrance. A nurse in a freshly starched uniform sat behind a small reception desk in the lobby. Fanny Lewis moved across the highly polished floor.

"I'm Lewis of the Standard. Anything new on the cop they brought in tonight?"

The nurse looked up at her inquisitively, pulled open a small card file. She checked through it, brought out a card. "Officer Hurley?"

"I guess that's him. How is he?"

"Condition serious. Hasn't regained consciousness. They have him in the operating room. You can wait on first-floor reception, if you like."

The reporter nodded curtly,

started down the long corridor to the reception room. A uniformed Negro policeman, whom she didn't know, two district men from the newspapers whom she did know and a taut-faced woman were in the room.

"Anything new?" Fanny greeted one of the reporters.

He shook his head, didn't raise his eyes from the paper-back he was reading. Fanny fumbled through her bag, found a crumpled cigarette, stuck it in the corner of her mouth. She touched a match to it, exhaled twin streams through her nostrils. She walked over to where the Negro patrolman sat twisting his uniform cap between his fingers.

"I'm Fanny Lewis," she told him. "From the Standard."

She was a little taken aback by the hostile look in his eyes. "There's nothing new yet. He's been in there over an hour," he told her.

"What happened?"

The cop shrugged. "We're not sure. He didn't check in at the end of his tour at midnight. We found him in a condemned house near the corner of 110th. Mugged."

Fanny stuck the cigarette in the corner of her mouth where it waggled when she talked. "What was he doing in there?"

The hostile look was more marked in the man's eyes. "He hasn't regained consciousness, so we don't know. When we find out, we'll tell you."

"Funny place for him to be, wasn't it?"

The woman who had been sitting silently, walked over. "What is that supposed to mean?"

Fanny Lewis looked the woman over insolently. She was nearing middle age, her face was prematurely lined, her hands big knuckled. "Who are you?"

"This is Mrs. Hurley, the officer's wife," the Negro cop told her.

Fanny shrugged. "I was just thinking it would be a funny place for him to be going—alone."

The other woman's lips split in a pitying smile. "I know who you are now. That paper. I heard all about you and your kind." She turned her back on the reporter and returned to her chair.

The color drained out of Fanny's face, she started to follow the older woman. The Negro cop caught her by the arm. "She has enough to do without having to slap you down," he told her in a hard voice.

"Who does she think she is?" Fanny raged. "Did you hear the way she talked to me?"

The cop nodded.

"You'd think I was dirt under her feet. Who is she that she can—"

The cop didn't raise his voice. "Leave her be. Suppose it were your husband?"

7.

The door to the room was closed,

the shades drawn. The sickly sweet smell of mezz perfumed the air. Ruby lay sprawled out on the unmade bed, her heavily lidded eyes following Big Step as he paced the small room.

Sitting in the corner, his back braced against the wall, Sam spun the cylinder of the Police Special he had taken from Hurley. He polished the long barrel on the leg of his pants then sighted down it.

"Hot damn," he grunted. "Them Aces come near me I blow a hole through 'em big enough you stick your head in."

Stud sat on the bottom of the bed, his eyes hungrily watching the soft rise and fall of the girl's breasts.

"When that Long Joe goin' get back with that car?" Big Step growled. He walked to the window, pulled back the shade, peered out.

He dropped the shade at the sound of the knock on the door. He motioned for Sam to cover the door with the gun, walked over and pulled it open. Long Joe scurried in, closed the door after him.

"I seen Cozy like you said. He say no soap on the car."

"Why not?"

Long Joe shrugged. "He say it crazy to go gunning cause they have your name. They know who if anything happen. That ofay seen it."

"He seen me, man," Big Step snarled. "He seen me real good."

Long Joe bared his teeth in a grin. "Sure, he seen you. But maybe when he see you again he say it ain't you he seen. If like Cozy say, you throw a little scare into him."

Big Step stared at him for a moment, comprehension dawning in his eyes. "That's a real gone cat, that Cozy. Real gone." He walked over to the bed, pushed Stud off and sat down. "We tell that ofay what happen to him and maybe his wife and kids. Then maybe he ain't got such a good memory, huh?"

Long Joe nodded.

"Give me that cop's book again." He took the dog-eared notebook, flipped through the pages, stopped at the last page. "Fred Morrow," he read, "453 East Seventh Street, Brooklyn." He looked up. "What time is it, man?"

Sam consulted his watch. "Almost two."

Big Step nodded. "We take a little walk, do some telephoning." He motioned for Sam to come along. When Stud rose to follow, Big Step shook his head. "You stay here. She flying and I don't want her to get in no trouble where she might do some talking."

Sam cast an envious glance at Stud, followed Big Step and Long Joe out. As soon as the door had closed behind them, Stud walked to the window, held his eye to the shade, waited until they had gone down the steps.

He walked over to where the girl lay. Her heavy lidded eyes had difficulty focusing. He ran his hand up the soft curve of her thigh. She stirred and murmured. His mouth found hers, soft and wet. She snuggled against him. "Be nice to Ruby, Step," she murmured. "Be nice to Ruby . . ."

The Elite Billiard Parlor stared at the dwindling traffic along Lexington Avenue through two large, dusty, plateglass windows set in the second story of a five-story brick building. A yellow light spilled from the windows to the dark street below, a lettered sign advertised "Open All Night."

Big Step led the way up the stairs and into the big room beyond. Shaded lamps hanging from the ceiling spilled triangles of light over the green felt tables; the clicking of pool balls was constant and muted. A thin man in a sleeveless sweater was perched on a high stool behind the cash register and was watching a hot game on table one.

Big Step walked over to him. "Cozy busy?"

The man turned rheumy eyes on him, wiped the tip of his long, thin nose with the side of his index finger. He seemed to have difficulty recognizing Big Step.

"Yeah, he's busy."

Big Step scowled at him, motioned the other two to follow him as he swaggered to the telephone

booth in the far corner of the room. While Long Joe laboriously looked up the telephone number of Fred Morrow on East Seventh Street in Brooklyn, Big Step kept his eyes glued on the entrance. The telephone booth was close enough to the escape hatch Cozy used for his shooting gallery upstairs, for him to make a fast break if he had to.

He dialed the number Long Joe took out of the phone book. He got a big charge out of the fear in the man's voice.

He called again at three o'clock. At four. And five.

He could tell by the sheer panic in the man's voice on the last call that he had him on the run.

He dug a cigarette from his shirt pocket, stuck it in the corner of his mouth. He shook Long Joe who had fallen asleep on one of the big armchairs, and was ready to lead the way out when they came in.

There were two of them. One was tall, young looking and mean. The other was an old guy in a wrinkled blue suit and a gray hat. Big Step had them figured the minute he saw them. They were cops.

He headed for the escape hatch, a doorway in the back of the room with Sam on his heels. Long Joe was still drowsing in the chair when they disappeared through it.

Across the room, Detective Marty Torno was showing the thin man in the sleeveless sweater

the muzzle of a snub-nosed .38.

"You push any buttons, friend, and you get a nice hole through your belly for resisting arrest." He watched while the thin man's finger froze inches from the button. "Come out from behind there."

The thin man skittered around the counter, came out into the open. "What is this, a stickup?"

"You know better than that, friend. Just an official visit, but we'd like it to be a surprise." He leaned over the counter, tugged the pushbutton loose from its wires. "Where's the gallery?"

"You gold?"

Torno shook his head. "No, we're not Fed. Just local. This is no raid. Where's the gallery?"

The thin man pointed to the rear of the room. "Upstairs."

"Show us," Torno urged. He followed the thin man to a concealed door set in the far wall. Beyond it a flight of stairs ran to the next floor. He wrinkled his nose at the familiar unpleasant smell of mezz, followed the thin man up the stairs. At the head of the stairs, a small landing was bordered by a railing.

A heavy dark blue drape had been hung across the doorway, effectively muffling all sound from the room beyond. Torno leaned over the railing, signalled to his partner by touching the tip of his index finger to the ball of his thumb. Doyle nodded.

"Okay, you. Downstairs," Torno

whispered to the thin man. "And don't try anything fancy. My partner's a real nervous guy. Real nervous."

The thin man licked at his lips, nodded. He headed for the stairs, went down them swiftly.

Torno slid behind the heavy curtain, fumbled for the knob to the door. It turned easily in his hand. He pulled it open a crack, applied his eye to it. A cloud of heavily scented smoke rolled out at him, almost smothering him. He heard the soft moan of a saxophone, the thin whine of a clarinet supplemented by other instruments he couldn't identify. The music was wild, frenzied. He traced its source to an automatic phonograph in the corner.

The room itself was bathed in a subdued light; a heavy dark rug covered the floor. There was no furniture in the room, but a dozen or more men and women were sprawled around the floor. Some white, some black.

A tall blonde danced wildly in the middle of the floor, her hair flying, her body undulating in time with the music. Nobody was paying her much attention, although she was easily recognizable as a top line dancing star from a current Broadway show.

A slow cloud of sluggish smoke hung over the whole room, stirring lazily in the draft created by Torno's half opened door. He pushed the door wider, slid in. No-

body paid any attention to him as he walked around the room to another door at the far side. He stood outside it for a moment, pushed it open. It was a completely equipped shooting gallery, with needles soaking in alcohol, pads of cotton, all the necessary equipment.

He was looking around when suddenly a man appeared from a room beyond. The newcomer's eyes widened when he saw the man with the gun. His mouth opened and he let out one screech, "Raid!" but the menace of Torno's gun kept him frozen where he stood.

In the room behind there was a moment of shocked silence, then chaos broke loose as men and women alike rushed for the escape hatch. One moment the place was filled with starry-eyed couples, the next it was empty except for the moaning music of the phonograph—and the two men, one with the gun in his hand, the other with his eyes fixed on its muzzle.

"Take it easy, Cozy," Torno commanded. "You may have a lot of stuff around that puts you out of this world, but what I've got here could make it permanent."

Cozy Jacks licked at his lips. "I ain't goin' give no trouble, officer. I been up against the gun before. They ways of fixing it so's nobody got to have trouble. Ain't that right?"

Torno grinned. "Could be."

Cozy relaxed. "For a bad minute, you sure had me scared. I—"

"I'm no Fed, Cozy. I'm local. You want out on this rap, you play with me. I'm looking for a punk named Big Step."

The black man licked his lips. "What makes you think I know him?"

"You must want trouble real bad. 'Cause I'm just the guy who can give it to you."

"You ain't Fed, you got no cause to give me trouble, mister." Cozy was beginning to feel sure of himself. "You ain't even got any call to come bustin' in here."

Torno grinned at him bleakly. He walked over to where the man stood, caught him by the front of his shirt, pulled him off balance. "Where is he?"

"I don't know who you talking about."

Torno's hand lashed out, knocked Cozy's face to the left, then he backhanded it into place. "You're his source. Where is he?"

Cozy started to retort, changed his mind. "I don't know. Honest. He don't come by hisself. He got a chick. She's real hooked. She come by."

"Who is she?"

Cozy licked at his lips, his eyes jumped around the room. "Ruby. Tha's all I know. Jus' Ruby."

Torno showed his teeth in a grin that didn't reach his eyes. "I'm looking for a good excuse to rough you up, Cozy. Keep talking and I'll forget you can't tell me what I want to know without teeth."

Cozy tried to meet his stare, dropped his eyes first. "She Ruby Steele. She a real gone chick. That Big Step he have her all for hisself in a room on 110th. Sixth house, third floor front."

"Sixth house, eh? Did you know a cop got mugged in the fourth house on that block?"

Cozy shrugged. "A man hears a lot of things, officer."

"Who did it?"

Cozy shook his head violently. "I don't hear that particular thing. I just hear this cop like girls. Maybe he followed one inside."

"Ruby?"

Cozy's face gleamed wet with perspiration. "She wouldn't be hard to follow." He watched Torno's expression anxiously. "Maybe you like—"

Torno's fist didn't travel more than a few inches. It caught Cozy on the side of the chin, drove him back against the table with the hypos and the set-ups. He crashed into it, hit the floor. He lay there in the wreckage blinking up at the detective.

"As soon as I hit the street, I'm tipping the Feds off to this setup. You better hit the road and keep going. Between the Feds and Big Step, when he hears you fingered him, this ain't going to be a very healthy neighborhood for you."

8.

Fred Morrow sat on the side of

his bed, chain-lit a fresh cigarette from the inch-long butt which he added to the pile in the ashtray beside him. His face was gray and wan in the morning light.

Ann stood at the window, with her eye placed to the edge of the shade. On the street below, a broad-shouldered man in a fedora leaned against the front fender of a black sedan. Every so often he glanced upward at the second story window, then his gaze wandered from one end of the deserted street to the other. After awhile, he crossed the sidewalk, mounted the stoop and dropped into the big wicker armchair.

"Fred! He's leaving. The cop is leaving," Ann called.

He crossed the room, put his eye to the window, sought for the reassuring bulk of the plainclothesman.

"He couldn't leave. His car's there. Maybe he just went on the porch to sit down. He wouldn't leave his car there." He dropped the shade. "You better get some sleep, Ann. You haven't closed your eyes all night."

"How can I close my eyes when I don't know when I'm liable to have my throat cut?" she wailed. "And the kids, what are we going to do about them?"

Fred raked his fingers through his hair, dropped wearily on the side of the bed. "They'll be all right. Everything will be all right. You'll see." Nervously, his eyes

sought out the clock. It was over forty minutes since the phone had rung. He pulled his eyes away, couldn't shut out the slow ticking of the clock from his ears.

The phone jangled with such a suddenness that both the man and the woman jumped. She plucked at her lower lip with a trembling hand.

"Th-they're calling more often now. It—it's not an hour since—"

Morrow ran the back of his hand down his jowls, stared at the phone with stricken eyes. "I—I won't answer it. Let it ring."

"You can't, Fred. The kids. It will awaken the kids."

A faint twitch had developed below the man's left eye. He had difficulty controlling it. He looked from the phone to his wife and back. Then, he shrugged helplessly and lifted the receiver.

"Morrow?" It was a new voice.

"Can't you leave us alone? What are you trying to do to us?"

"This is Torno, Detective Division, East Harlem. I've got some good news for you. We've picked up Big Step."

Morrow was speechless for a second. "You're sure?"

"It's Big Step, all right. We picked him up a few minutes ago. The boys are talking to him in the squad room. He admits his identity."

"Did—did he admit the killing?"

Torno's laugh was low. "Not yet. They never do—at first."

"Will—will I have to identify him?"

"Maybe not. Depends on how sure he is of himself. I just thought I'd let you know so you could get a few hours' rest,"

Morrow nodded. "Thanks. Thanks a lot." He reached over, dropped the receiver on the hook. "They've got him."

Ann buried her face in her hands. "Thank God. Oh, thank God." She swayed gently. "It's been like a nightmare. Any minute I expected to see one of them coming through the window—" She broke off, stared at her husband. "They got him, but what about his friends? What about the others?"

"They're probably hiding. They know the cops mean business now." Some assurance was beginning to seep back into Morrow, warming the marrow of his bones like a stiff drink. "They're nothing but rats. Now that they know they can't get away with murder, they'll run and hide."

The woman walked to the window, pulled back the shade a bit, stared down into the street. "They didn't take away the cop. He's still down there."

Some of the assurance drained away. "Maybe they couldn't reach him. Maybe they're just letting him finish his tour. He goes off duty in a couple of hours."

The rest of the assurance drained out, leaving him limp and worn when the phone rang at six.

"They got Big Step. You know that mister?" the receiver told him. "They got Big Step and they expect you to finger him for them."

"Who is this?" he demanded weakly.

"Nem'mind that. I just figured you might like to know you ain't fingering nobody for nobody. You seen what happened to that spic yesterday. How you like somethin' like that, Mister Big Mouth? How you like that, eh?"

Cold perspiration broke out on Morrow's forehead and upper lip. "You wouldn't try anything like that," he blustered. "I signed a statement and you know it. Anything happens to me, and they'll have your friend for sure."

"Nothin' goin' to happen to you, mister. Nothin' at all. But how about your wife, mister? You got kids? Nothin' goin' to happen to you for sure. It's goin' to happen to them."

The phone clicked. Morrow sat holding a dead receiver to his ear.

"It was them?" It was more a flat statement than a question.

He looked up into his wife's face, nodded. "His friends. If I talk, they'll hit back through you and the kids." Morrow shook his head. "Things like that can't happen to us. Not in this country. These punks aren't God Almighty. They can't make their own laws and laugh at the whole world. They can't!"

"We could move," the woman

said in a low voice. "We could just pick up and get out of here. Not let anybody know where we were."

The man looked around. "But this is our home, Ann. We've lived here over twenty years. Both the kids were born here."

"I don't want them to die here." There was a touch of incipient hysteria in her voice.

"But where can we go, Ann? Where can we go? I can't quit my job and leave everything we've worked for."

"What good is it, if we're afraid to turn around? If we never know when they're going to—"

Morrow shook his head. "We can't do it, Ann, they won't let us." He walked to the window, pulled the shade back, stared down at the black car at the curb. "We thought they put a man down there to keep anyone from getting in. Maybe they're keeping him there to keep anyone from getting out."

9.

Fred Morrow's children couldn't have been happier. Young Freddy felt like a conquering hero when the patrol car delivered him right to the school. He got out under the eyes of envious classmates, waved to the cop as the car pulled away. The joy was slightly tempered by the fact that Mr. Edwards, the gym teacher, came out and took him right into the principal's office. He

had to sit there until it was time for class and he couldn't mix with the rest of the gang out on the playground. But he had had that moment of triumph, and there would be another this afternoon when his police escort returned to pick him up.

His sister Gloria was also the object of envy by her classmates at Abraham Lincoln High. The cop assigned to escort her was young, couldn't have been over twenty-one by Gloria's fourteen-year-old figuring, and he was handsome. Besides, he just stood around and talked to her until it was time for her to go into classes. She didn't bother to explain what he was there for, hoped that some of her classmates might think it was a boy friend walking her to and from school.

Big Step sat huddled in a wooden chair on the far side of the desk. He glanced across at Torno, lifted the corner of his mouth in a snarl, looked away.

"A real tough cat," Torno grunted. "You ever hear one of those real tough ones crack, Al?"

Doyle nodded. "When they crack, they really crack. They sing like a stagestruck canary."

Big Step rolled his eyes up insolently. "Not me, cop. I got nothin' to sing about. You ain't got a thing on me. Not a thing."

"Let's find out." Torno turned to Doyle. "Take him down to In-

terrogation. I'll be right down, Al." He waited until his partner caught the manacled Big Step under the arm, led him through the door. Then he dialed a number. It rang several times before he got an answer.

"Larsen. Treasury."

"Swede, Marty Torno down at the Bureau. I got a hot one for you. A fully set-up shooting gallery."

The voice on the other end grunted. "Good. Got an address?"

Torno gave him the address on Lexington Avenue. "Name's Jacks, Cozy Jacks. Entrance is a door on the back wall of the Elite Billiard Parlor. We busted the place up a little getting some information, but we left enough for your boys."

"Thanks, Torno. We'll handle from here."

Torno dropped the receiver on its hook, turned off the lamp on his desk, headed for Interrogation.

Big Step lolled in a wooden chair in the center of the room, grinned at Al Doyle and two other plainclothesmen who ringed him in a semicircle.

"Go ahead, try beating it out of me," he jeered. "I'm under age. You know what that means? You can't lay a hand on me."

Torno nodded to the plainclothesmen. "I'll take him."

"He's a snotty little bastard, Marty. Just let me—" one of the plainclothesmen pleaded.

Torno shook his head, grinned

down at Big Step. "He only thinks he's a big man. Wait'll the stuff wears off and his stomach gets weak."

Smirking amusement drained from the boy's eyes, leaving his parted lips a caricature of a smile. "You better not slap me around, mister. I yell so loud even the mayor hear me. Yeah, and the newspapers, too."

Torno walked behind the chair, caught a handful of Big Step's hair, pulled his head back until the overhead light beat straight into his face. "Start yelling, you cop-mugging bastard."

"I know my rights. Just because I a black boy—"

Torno bared his teeth in a mirthless grin. "Pulling that won't do you any good. All you punks get the same dose—white, black, yellow or red."

Big Step licked at his lips. "You just talk big, Mister Man. You think you scare me with that kinda talk, don't you?"

"I hope you keep on being tough," Torno told him softly. He tugged down on the hair, brought water to Big Step's eyes. "You read the wrong comic books. There's plenty of ways of breaking a punk like you. And without leaving marks."

Big Step stared up at the detective, the first signs of fear beginning to show in his eyes.

"How about Hurley?" Torno asked.

Big Step's face was gleaming wetly under the light. "I don't know nothin' about no Hurley."

"How'd you get him into the hallway?"

Big Step licked at his lips. "I don't know what you're talkin' about, mister."

Torno released his grip on the hair, shoved Big Step's head forward. "You made a mistake on that one. If Hurley goes out, you don't stand a chance. Maybe for cutting the Spic, some soft-headed judge will settle for a murder two. But nobody's going to stand still for anything but the chair, if the cop dies."

"I don't know nothin'."

Torno brought a cigarette from his pocket, stuck it in the corner of his mouth, touched a match to it. "That's not what Cozy says."

Big Step folded his hands in his lap, stared down at them.

"Cozy says you used a girl to get Hurley into the hallway."

Big Step continued to stare at his hands.

Torno grabbed the hair, pulled the boy's head back, stuck his face inches away. "You wanted his book, didn't you? It had the address of the guy who was due to finger you for the cutting. That's why you tried to kill Hurley."

"I don't know nothin' about it," Big Step maintained.

Two hours later, Torno swabbed at his streaming forehead, swore at the wilted figure in the chair.

"He's a tough one to break," Doyle muttered. "But why get in a fever about it? Robby's on his way down here now with the witness."

"Morrow?"

Doyle nodded. "They're picking him up. Robby wants to sew it up good. He don't want anything to go wrong. So why should we sweat? He's going to grab all the credit anyhow."

Torno rolled down his sleeves, nodded to Doyle. "You're right. Let Robby do the work. Cuff him to the chair. I'll send a couple of boys in to make sure he don't cool off."

Outside in the bull pen Torno stopped at the first desk, where Connie Ryan was laboriously typing a report with one finger.

"Anything from the hospital on Hurley?"

Ryan shook his head. "They think it's a fracture. Bastards stomped him, looks like."

Torno growled in his throat. "We got the guy in the sweat box. I've been working him over. Want to keep him company awhile? Guy from the D.A.'s office is on his way over. Should be here pretty quick and I don't want the pigeon to cool off."

Ryan nodded. "Okay, Marty. This Morrow—he's a God-damned fool. Whatever happens to him he deserves. A white man shouldn't tangle with Harlem."

"Sometimes a guy talks too fast

for his own good," Marty admitted. He sat down, laced his fingers behind his head. "Those neighborhood people didn't speak up because what the hell, one more spic dead—so what? But it's not whites and blacks, Connie. Let's say a Long Island Negro had seen it and his name went down in Hurley's book. Would Big Step be after him or not?"

Ryan shrugged and headed for Interrogation. Torno rubbed at his eyes with the heels of his hands, swore under his breath. He had hoped to have Big Step broken and ready to sing by the time Robby arrived. A quick arrest and statement in a case like this could mean a lot, but now—hell, let Robby skim off all the credit.

He got up, walked over to where a water cooler was humming to itself near the window. Outside, the first signs of day had lightened the sky, painted the empty street gray.

A few minutes later, Sol Robbins skidded his car to a stop at the curb, pushed open the door. "Okay, Mr. Morrow. They'll have him ready for us."

Fred Morrow blinked red-rimmed eyes, shook his head uncertainly. "I don't know if I'm doing the right thing, Mr. Robbins. My family—"

Robbins took his arm. "Don't worry about your family. We're going to put this fellow where he can't harm anybody. Ever."

Morrow permitted himself to be guided from the car and across the sidewalk. The little Assistant D.A. kept up a happy chatter all the way up the stairs to the detective bull pen.

He pushed the door open, stuck his head in. "Torno around?"

Torno waved him in from his desk.

Robbins nodded for his witness to follow him into the big room. He walked down to where Torno sat, shook hands ceremoniously. "This is Mr. Morrow, Marty." He turned to Morrow. "Marty's the cop we've got to thank for such fast action."

Morrow shook hands. "H-how about his friends? Did you get them, too?"

Torno shook his head. "Not yet. We will."

"Morrow got a call at six from one of them. They're still trying to throw a scare into him." Robbins clapped Morrow on the shoulder. "But it'd take more than a couple of young punks to scare him off. Right, Fred?"

"I don't know. My family—"

"These punks do a lot of talking. Isn't that right, Marty?" Robbins appealed to the detective. "Ever know of a case where they made good their threats? I never did. I get 'em all the time."

"I wouldn't worry too much about 'em, Mr. Morrow," Torno said. "As soon as we nail this character for the cutting, he'll break.

And that mob of his will forget him and you at the same time."

"I sure hope so."

The Assistant D.A. asked, "Where've you got him, Marty?"

"Interrogation. Connie Ryan's keeping him company."

"Might as well get it over with,"

Robbins said. "Okay with you, Mr. Morrow?"

"I guess so."

Robbins slapped him on the shoulder. "There's nothing to worry about. You just take a good look at him and tell us if he's the punk you saw knife the other kid."

Morrow nodded. "Then what happens?"

Robbins grinned. "Then it's my baby. We'll rush through an arraignment and an indictment. You'll be present, of course, to make the identification formally. After that, it's my job to put him in the Death House." He nodded to Torno. "Let's get it over with, Marty."

Big Step was still cuffed to the chair in the middle of the room. The bright light burned down mercilessly, rivulets of perspiration ran down the side of his face, dripped from the tip of his nose.

"You'll be able to see him," Torno explained, "but with that light in his face he can't see anything. I'll hold his face up for you, so just take your time. Okay?"

Morrow nodded.

They walked into the room,

Torno nodded to Ryan. "He do any talking, Connie?"

The plainclothesman shook his head. "He's pretty stubborn."

"It doesn't matter. This is the man who saw him cut the Spic. A positive identification from him is all we're going to need." Torno walked behind Big Step's chair, caught him by the hair, pulled his face up. "Take a good look, mister. Is this the punk you saw cut Julio Rigas?"

With a sinking feeling, Fred Morrow stared at the young face. He could see it again as its owner wielded the knife that turned the other boy into a bleeding rag doll sprawled on a sidewalk. In his ears he could hear the threats, the obscenities its owner had mouthed over the phone. He could smell the perspiration, sense the fear that permeated the room. In his mouth was the bitter taste of his own fear, his own cowardice.

"How about it?" Robbins had difficulty keeping the anxiety from his voice.

Fred Morrow took a deep breath. "It's him. That's the one I saw stab the other boy to death."

10.

Fanny Lewis walked into the City Room of the Standard. She made her way through the organized confusion of the desks. Men and women were sitting in front of typewriters of varying ages and

vintages, punching out stories on the keys for the next edition.

She made her way up to the slot where two men were chopping copy, two others leaned back and stared with bored eyes around the room. A thin man with tired, baggy eyes, a green shade pulled low over his forehead sat at a desk apart, checking the opposition papers for follows, throwing the mutilated copy into a barrel-sized waste basket at his elbow.

He looked up with no show of enthusiasm as Fanny Lewis stopped at his desk. Bristles glinted whitely on his chin, the side of his mouth was discolored from the tobacco he chewed. He didn't like Fanny Lewis and she knew he didn't like her, any more than he liked working for the Standard with its taboos and bias.

Ken Flint had once been a top flight newsman. His by-line had been featured on the front pages of top dailies all over the country. When he was riding high, managing editors and publishers were willing to put up with his losing bouts with the bottle. But as time slowed his reflexes and alcohol dulled his perception, they became less and less understanding. Jobs became fewer and harder to find. Soon no paper in the city would touch him.

Except the Standard. Only the Standard would touch a newsman of Flint's reputation, because not a newspaperman of Flint's innate

ability would touch the Standard. But Ken Flint had found out that by-lines on clippings in manila envelopes in the basement morgues of even the best papers in the world are pretty thin fare. He swallowed his pride and permitted his new bosses to put him behind a desk where what was left of his genius could be used to sugarcoat their preachings into a semblance of news.

He stared at the plain, angular woman in front of him. He had to work with such as these, but he didn't have to like them. Or even pretend to.

"What's on your mind, Lewis?" he wanted to know.

"That cop. The one they found in that abandoned house uptown. He still hasn't recovered consciousness." She pulled some folded notes out of her bag. "Looks like he tried to take some girl in there and either her parents or her boy friend beat him up."

Flint curled his lip. "That's the way it looks, eh? The girl wouldn't have been a black one, by any chance?"

She looked up from her notes, tried to stare him down, dropped her eyes first. She hated herself, for not being able to stand up to this alcoholic wreck, but she couldn't face up to the disgust in his eyes. She went back to her notes.

"I also got a tip that they picked up a boy on suspicion in the Rigas

stabbing during the night. I couldn't find out where they took him, but they've probably given him a bad time."

"You ought to see the other guy. He's in the morgue."

"You don't know this boy did it. Neither do the cops. They just needed a fall guy so they went out and grabbed the first kid they could lay their hands on. Just because he was a Negro, they—"

Flint reached over, pulled a page of typewritten copy from a spindle. "His name's Stepin Field. They call him Big Step, he's got a record as long as your arm." He flipped the paper at her. "D.A.'s office has a guy who saw the cutting—"

"I've already talked to that witness. I wouldn't take his word that today's Tuesday. He's obviously a Negro baiter and he wouldn't hesitate to swear away—"

"Save it for your story," Flint told her wearily. "I may have to turn those orations of yours into English for this rag's illiterates, but I don't have to listen to it."

Lewis' face was white with rage. "If the boss ever heard you talk about our readers like that—"

"He's heard me. He doesn't like me any better than you do. But he can't get anybody with a stomach as strong to work as cheap. And he feels the same way about our dear readers, so stop the crap and turn some out."

He watched her stalk back to

an unpainted desk near the wall. She slammed her bag on the desk top, yanked some copy paper from her basket. In a minute her typewriter was rattling the whole desk under the fury of her punching.

Slowly, the tempo of the city room changed. Copy boys who had been ambling between the desks, stopping to exchange jokes and gossip with the men and women sitting there drinking coffee from cardboard containers, were now scurrying with copy in one hand and galleys in the other. Cigarettes lay smoldering on the edges of the desks, burning down to add new service stripes on what was left of the varnish. The coffee became cold in the soggy containers.

The Standard was getting ready to go to bed with its daily impassioned defense of the downtrodden everywhere.

Later, the bus dropped Fanny Lewis a block from her home. She dragged weary feet down the street to her house, an old converted brownstone that nestled anonymously in a row of identical brownstones on the fringe area in the lower 100's. She wished they could move away from this neighborhood where whites intermingled with blacks harmoniously, but where she was uncomfortable in either camp. She dismissed the thought with the knowledge that it would be the same anyplace. She never told anyone what she

was unless they asked her point blank; and then she took a fierce pride in saying she was a Negro.

Wearily she climbed the stairs. The door to her flat was unlocked. She pushed it open and walked in. Benjy's coat had been tossed carelessly onto a chair, dragged onto the floor. She picked it up, brushed it off. This suit had cost her \$125 and deserved better treatment. She hung it carefully on the back of the chair, walked to the bedroom door.

At the open door, she froze. Benjy lay unclothed in the bed. Next to him was the naked body of a tall, full-blown blonde who looked like a chorus girl or a model.

Fury turned Fanny's entrails to water. She ran across the room, grabbed Benjy by the shoulder, turned him over. He woke to lay staring at her stupidly for a moment, then anger twisted his face. "What you think you're doin', pushin' me around like that?" He reached up, put the flat of his hand against her, sent her reeling backwards.

The girl at his side moaned softly, squirmed sensuously. She opened her eyes, stared at Fanny who stood glaring at her.

"Get her out of here, Benjy!" Fanny spat through clenched teeth. "Get her out or I'll throw her out!"

The girl in the bed grinned. "That dried up woman going to

throw me out, honey?" Her voice slurred from drink or dope, Fanny didn't know which.

Fanny went for her, her nails poised.

As Benjy watched, grinning, the girl in the bed laughed, rolled out of the way, sank her fingers into Fanny's wispy hair and pulled her down. They rolled off the bed onto the floor, biting, clawing. The blonde's youth made the difference. Her hand went up and down like a piston, each time connecting with the older woman's face with loud, sharp slaps.

Finally, the blonde stood up, magnificent, long-legged, high breasts heaving. Fanny lay on the floor moaning softly, her face buried in her hands.

Perspiration gleamed on the long flanks, the flat stomach, the lithe hips of the young girl. "Tell her, Benjy. Tell her how it's going to be," she panted.

Benjy, who had been enjoying the fight, reached for a cigarette. "This is Flora. She goin' to move in with us, Fanny."

The hands fell away from Fanny's face. She sat up, stared at Benjy with stricken eyes. "What do you mean she's going to move in with us?"

Benjy lit the cigarette, blew smoke at her. "You heard what I said. Flora, she's goin' move in with us." He reached over, pulled the gleaming body of the younger woman to him. "She got no place

to stay so I thought she stay with us. Till she find a job anyhow."

Fanny pulled herself painfully to her feet. "If you think I'd ever let you get away with that—"

Benjy laughed at her. "I ain't gettin' away with anything. Just that Flora goin' stay with us." He made no attempt to hide the contempt in his eyes. "You don't like that, you jus' go ahead and move out. Flora stays."

Fanny's eyes hopscotched from her husband's grin to the smile on the face of the girl. "I wouldn't stay here for all the money in the world."

"You be back," Benjy told her. "You be back real soon."

She stared at him, then dropped her eyes. "Where could I sleep out there, Benjy? Where could I sleep?"

II.

Ruby sprawled on the unmade bed, watched the men from under half closed eyes. The lift from the last mezz was fading and she felt down.

Sam sat in his customary place on the floor, the wall supporting his back, polishing the Police Special with an old rag.

There was a soft knock on the door. Long Joe pulled the snub-nose .38, held it under the table. "Who that?"

"Stud."

Long Joe motioned for Sam to

open the door. Stud came in, set the bag full of coffee containers and buns on the table.

"You hear the radio?" he wanted to know.

"How we hear any radio?" Sam growled. "You know we ain't got no radio."

"That ofay, he goin' to put the finger on Big Step today, 'bout two 'clock. In front of a judge."

Ruby sat up on the bed, swung her legs over. "I thought you cats scare that man so he don't finger Big Step. I thought you give him a real big scare."

Long Joe shook his head, swore. "That man put the finger on him, that the end for Big Step. Maybe for us, too. They get Big Step, they come looking for us. They know he didn' do it alone."

Sam scratched at the side of his head with the muzzle of the Police Special. "Where this all goin' happen, Stud?"

"Courthouse. Why?"

Sam shrugged. "We gotta get Big Step out'n there."

Stud curled his lip contemptuously. "How you goin' get Big Step out? You goin' walk in that courthouse with your popgun and take him away from 'em cops? You musta been sniffin' Cozy's powder when no one's looking."

"Cozy ain't there no more. Feds knock him off." Sam paused for a moment, thinking. "We gotta get Big Step out. An we don' need no gun to do it. That

ofay got to finger him before they can hold him. Ain' 'at right?"

Stud started to deride, was waved to silence by Long Joe. "That's right, Sam. The ofay fingers him, Big Step's in trouble. He don' finger him, he ain't. But how we goin' fix it so's he don' finger him?"

Sam grinned. "We fix it."

Sol Robbins was walking on air. His boss, the Hon. Francis X. Corrigan, had personally spoken some kind words for the speed with which his office had arranged for the arraignment of the suspect in the widely publicized "Teen Age Murder Incorporated" killing. Corrigan, himself, had arranged for Judge Aaron Shapiro, a widely publicized foe of juvenile crime, to preside and plans were already under foot for widespread coverage by the press.

Sol Robbins already had visions of moving up into the number one assistant slot, with an office right next to Corrigan. All this on the wave of public applause, for a job well done.

He assigned Cliff Meyers, a former Police Department lieutenant, now attached to the district attorney's office, to the task of delivering Fred Morrow safely to the arraignment.

"Morrow's pretty skittish and scared stiff," Robbins told Cliff confidentially. "And he'd back out if he could. All we've got to do is

get him to stand up in front of Shapiro and finger this punk and we're in. Your job is to make sure he gets there. I'll do the rest."

Meyers had a shock of silvery white wavy hair, startlingly blue eyes, a glowing pink complexion. His constant smile, which exposed a complete set of porcelain jackets over his front central teeth, disguised the fact that in his heyday Cliff Meyers was one of the ablest strong-arm men attached to the Central Office Squad. The bulk of his shoulders indicated that he could still be a dangerous man in a knock-down, drag-out fight.

"He'll get there if my boys have to carry him piggyback. What time do you want him delivered?"

Robbins took a moment to think that over. "No later than two-fifteen. Don't get him there too early. Try shooting for around two, on the head."

Meyers nodded. "He'll be there."

Robbins slapped him on the shoulder. "I'm counting on you, Cliff. Frankly, our whole case hinges on his identification. If he backs out we haven't a thing to hold the punk on."

"He identified him this morning, you said."

The Assistant D.A. nodded. "Unofficially. I wanted to make sure there was no screw-up. I let him have a look at the punk in Interrogation. It's the right one, all right."

"So stop worrying. You don't

think a handful of punk kids are going to stick their necks out trying to pull anything, do you?"

Robbins shook his head uncertainly. "I don't know. That's why I'm counting on you, Cliff. Those hopped-up kids, you can't figure from one minute to the next what they'll do. I think they're bluffing, but I'm taking no chances. Until I get my conviction, we carry this guy Morrow around on a silk pillow."

"And after that?"

Robbins shrugged. "What are we, his keepers? After that he's on his own. Strictly."

12.

Fred Morrow was apologetic when Cliff Meyers walked in.

"I've tried to talk her out of it, Mr. Meyers, but my wife insists on going along."

Cliff Meyers showed his porcelain jackets in a disarming grin. "Why not? How often does a citizen get an opportunity to get a ride in the District Attorney's own Cadillac? And get a front row seat when Judge Shapiro makes a speech?" He turned to Ann Morrow. "You get your hat, Mrs. Morrow. We'll wait for you."

"You're sure it's all right?" Fred Morrow sounded worried. "Mr. Robbins didn't say anything about Ann coming along."

"Take my word for it," Cliff winked. "It's okay."

In spite of herself, Ann felt a little twinge of pride as she walked down the porch steps to the big shiny Cadillac at the curb. She was aware of the tilted shades, the moving curtains on some of the houses, the franker curiosity of those who stood on their porches and watched her leave.

She had to admit that she enjoyed sinking back against the luxurious cushions, as the big car whisked her out Flatbush Avenue to the bridge. Traffic opened up for them as the driver touched his siren. She was comfortably aware of the two heavy set men in the front seat, of the quiet assurance and unquestioned capability of Cliff Meyers. She was beginning to wonder if maybe she hadn't been a little silly to try to talk Fred out of doing his duty.

Fred sat in the other corner of the back seat, watching traffic and houses fly by. He was wondering what they were saying back at the office. True, Lionel Simons, the big boss, had gotten on the phone and commended him for his public spirit in going through with this thing. He had even advised him to take a few days off. But he had sounded a little critical, when he asked Fred where the reporter for the Standard got the idea that he worked for an organization that was mulcting Negroes with substandard housing. He asked him to keep the firm's name out of the papers. Maybe that was the

reason he told him not to hurry back to the office. Maybe he figured public curiosity would have died down by then. Silently, he cursed the reporter from the Standard and her bold-faced putting of words into his mouth. He resolved that if she had any questions today, he'd ignore her.

At the courthouse, the Cadillac pulled into a special garage. Cliff Meyers escorted them to a private elevator that took them directly to the second floor where the arraignment was scheduled.

Cut rate attorneys, anxious relatives, friends of those being arraigned milled around or held up the old, paint-peeled walls of the corridor. Cliff Meyers' experienced eyes ran over the crowd and he was relieved to note that, though he was ready for trouble, no one appeared to constitute a threat to his charge.

There were a half dozen Negroes interspersed in the crowd. Three he recognized as lawyers, one of them regarded as a criminal lawyer who thus far had failed to get the break he deserved; a fourth worked for a bondsman. The other two looked and acted like a young married couple.

As soon as the reporters spotted Meyers and his charge, they descended on him en masse.

"This the key witness, Cliff?" one of the picture snatchers asked.

"Take it easy, boys. Mr. Morrow can't talk now. Robby'll give you

a chance to get all the pictures you want after he comes out." He cut a fast path through the small group, parried questions as he ushered the Morrrows into Courtroom B, ignored the groans of the press.

Inside the courtroom itself, there was a sprinkling of spectators in the rows of hard wooden seats directly behind the railed off portion. To the left of the inside portion, a few reporters sat fidgeting through the early editions of the afternoon papers. Fanny Lewis was among them and vaguely Fred Morrow wondered about her newspaper and how it manipulated facts and justice.

Sol Robbins was sitting at a long table near the front of the room. Judge Shapiro hadn't as yet made an appearance and the prisoner had not been brought up.

"We're a little early," Cliff Meyers grinned. "I guess the Judge had a long lunch. Suppose we go up front and sit with Robby."

Fred Morrow nodded. His wife said to him, "I wonder—" Ann looked a little embarrassed. "I wonder if I could go to the little girls' room."

"Sure. But I'd better go along with you," Cliff Meyers offered.

Ann looked perplexed.

"Not all the way," Cliff grinned. "I'll just walk down the hall with you, show you where it is."

It was almost a full minute before Fanny Lewis, the humiliation

of the Flora incident bothering her, realized where they might be going and decided to follow. An interview with Mrs. Morrow, alone, with exactly the right questions posed, might be better than the account of what she had come here to report. She slid off the bench.

Cliff escorted Ann Morrow close to the door marked "Ladies" and stood there waiting. In a moment the corridor reporters and photographers were on him. Engaged in fending off their questions, turning good-naturedly to say "Nix" to a photographer who wanted to catch Cliff and the key witness' wife and the door with the "Ladies" on it in one overall shot, he did not see what had happened in the busy hallway.

Ruby had ambled over, turned the knob and walked in. The woman was standing in front of the mirror fixing her hat when the girl's face appeared in the mirror. Ann Morrow turned around.

When she saw the expression on Ruby's face, she started to scream. It came out a smothered moan as she tumbled backwards, fell against the basket for paper towels. Ruby moved in on her with a loaded handbag. She brought it down again and again on the head and face of the woman.

Ann could feel her senses reeling. She knew that only the arrival of someone could save her. She prayed that someone would

come. The warm wet feeling on the side of her face she knew to be blood. She tried to protect her head from the heavy blows of the bag, only half succeeded.

Ann was dimly aware that her prayer had been answered. She saw the hem of another dress, shoes, silk stockings in heavy shapeless legs. The scream that had been lodged in her throat broke out. She screamed again, and again . . .

Outside, Cliff Meyers cursed and sprinted for the door. He pulled it open, saw Ann's face—a mass of blood. Blood was pouring from her nose and lips and from cuts over her eyes and above the hair-line.

He caught Ruby around the waist, slammed her back against the wall. She stood there, panting, glaring at him.

To Fanny Lewis, in the fore part of the crowd jamming the restroom door, he said, "What?" The question was loaded with hot anger, with threat. Fanny's eyes hopped from Meyers to the girl to the woman on the floor.

"She say dirty things to me. She want me to do things," Ruby snarled. "Go ahead, arrest me. I tell them everything. I tell the court what she want me to do. She a dike! A lady lover!"

Cliff Meyers stared at her open-mouthed. Then he said to the reporter, "All right, Lewis. You saw it. Walked in on it. What hap-

pened? Help a dirty little slut like this to ruin the name of a woman and her kids? Go ahead. It'll sell more copies of that filthy rag of yours."

Shocked at what she had walked in on, what she actually had been responsible for stopping, knowing the truth as this man knew it, Fanny Lewis gave no answer.

Meyers turned to Ruby. "You won't get away with this," he snarled. "I'll see that you don't."

The A.P. reporter kneeling on the floor, wiping some of the blood from Ann's face with a wet towel asked Ann, as he helped her to her feet, "What happened?"

Meyers pulled him away. "She can't talk now, boys. I've got to get this woman to a hospital."

"What about the girl?" the A.P. reporter wanted to know.

Ruby grinned at him insolently. "Lady lover. That what she is. Go ahead, Mr. Policeman. Arrest me. You do just that," she jeered. She spat at Ann. "I tell the whole world what she is. A dirty dike."

Ann caught Meyers by the sleeve. "Let her go. Don't make any more trouble. Let her go, let her go."

"Well?" Meyers' eyes fastened on Fanny's face. She felt the old familiar churning in her stomach at the look of revulsion in the man's eyes.

"You see?" Ruby said to the crowd. "Anybody get arrested, it better be her. Saying dirty things

to me." She pushed her way through the small crowd clogging the doorway. No one tried to stop her.

Inside Courtroom B, the arraignment was already under way. Sol Robbins got to his feet, brushed an imaginary piece of lint from his lapel as he marshaled his thoughts, approached the bench. Suavely, he outlined the charges on which the defendant was being held.

Judge Shapiro scowled ominously at the sound of the disturbance in the hall, fixed Fanny Lewis with a baleful glare as she found her way back to her seat in the press section. He motioned for a bailiff to go out into the hall and quiet the perpetrators of the disturbance. Then he nodded for Robbins to proceed.

"Your Honor, because of the frightening disregard for law and order exhibited by this defendant and because of the threats made against the person of an eye witness to this slaying, I move that permission be granted to have the suspect identified by the witness here and now."

"It's a little unusual," Judge Shapiro said, "but if that's the way you intend to nail down your indictment, it's all right with the court." He looked up as the bailiff returned. "What was all that noise?"

The bailiff walked up to the

bench. "Some woman was attacked in the ladies' room, your Honor. She got beaten up real bad. Cliff Meyers from the D.A.'s office is taking her over to the hospital."

Judge Shapiro frowned, failed to see that the key witness had risen in his seat, and reluctantly permitted Sol Robbins to pull him him back down.

"Bring the suspect up to the bench, you men," the Judge ordered two uniformed patrolmen who stood on either side of the prisoner.

The night in jail had made Big Step look shrunken. His hair was mussed. His eyes were red-rimmed and bloodshot.

"Will you stand, Mr. Morrow?" Robbins said. "Will you take a good look at this man? Is he the man you saw stab Julio Rigas to death?"

Fred Morrow stared at the prisoner in front of him. He felt hate rising in his throat like gall. He could see his wife lying on the rest room floor, her face smashed. He could see the body of Julio Rigas twitch as Big Step sadistically plunged the knife into it three times. He thought of his son and daughter, no longer free to play and walk around like other kids. He thought of the phone calls, the nightmare of night, the abuse and obscenity.

He said, "I never saw him before in my life."



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