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MANHUNT

DETECTIVE STORY MONTHLY

APRIL
35 CENTS



A PETER CHAMBERS
NOVELETTE BY

Henry Kane

EVERY
STORY
NEW!

See "Everybody's Watching Me"
By MICKEY SPILLANE, page 111

ONE STEP AHEAD

We've been trying desperately to keep up with the newsstand demand for *Manhunt*, but—we're happy to say—*Manhunt* readers have always been one step ahead of us.

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MANHUNT

APRIL, 1953

CONTENTS

SERIAL

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

NOVELETTES

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

THE BLUE SWEETHEART *by David Goodis* Page 102

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

SHORT STORIES

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

MUGGER MURDER *by Richard Deming* Page 85

KID KILL *by Evan Hunter* Page 93

BE MY GUEST *by Robert Turner* Page 39

BIG TALK *by Kris Neville* Page 31

SHAKEDOWN *by Roy Carroll* Page 57

SPECIAL FEATURE

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT? *by Shepherd Kole* Page 100

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*One minute a man can
be sitting and drinking —
the next, he can be dead.
All it can take is*

One Little Bullet

A NOVELETTE

BY HENRY KANE

NEW YORK is lousy with night clubs. There are strip joints, clip joints, jive joints, live joints, square joints, hip joints, crash joints, splash joints, crumb joints, class joints.

The Long-Malamed is class. All the way.

It is located on Fifty-fifth Street at the southeast corner of Madison Avenue. It is a narrow, two-story, rust-red building with a shimmering, scarlet, patent leather canopy, and a shimmering, scarlet-adorned doorman. Three steps up are heavy translucent glass doors and, when you push through, you're in the small ante room which is the cocktail lounge of the Long-Malamed.

Separating the cocktail lounge and the night club room are two winding white marble stairways, each — I had been informed by Tobias Eldridge, the amiable genius behind the bar — leading upstairs to the well-furnished town apartment of Joe Malamed, one of the owners of the club.

I had never met Mr. Joe Malamed. He had recently moved up to the big time, coming from Miami and forming a partnership with a young man of many dollars, one Melvin Long. Joe Malamed had a wife, and I had heard, too, that she took an active interest in the operation of the club.

I was seated at a hinge in the bar, near to the door and opposite the check-room, working on a tall scotch

and water, and watching Miss Irene Whitney.

Nothing had been stacked like Miss Irene Whitney since the Pyramids. Miss Whitney was tall and perfect. Miss Whitney has a shock of tousled short-cut iridescent auburn hair that was practically indecent, a lovely nose, and dark blue eyes. Miss Whitney also had legs.

At the hazard of a guess. I would suggest that Miss Whitney had been hired by the Long-Malamed on the strength of her legs. That, anyway, is what her uniform declared. She wore spike-heeled black shoes, black opera-length nylons, a tiny flounced skirt (that was one flounce and no skirt), a black silk sash, a white silk blouse and a short sequined monkey jacket. Miss Whitney was a serious student of the drama, attending a dramatic school in the daytime and acquiring the wherewithal to do same by checking coats in night-clubs at night, and offering cigarettes and fuzzy little pandas for sale. Miss Whitney was a floor show on her own.

The floor show moved to me at the bar.

"Hi," I said. "How's Yale?"

"Yale." Disparagement made wrinkles on her nose, adding to its effectiveness.

Yale was a young man who attended Yale University, a school of learning. Weekends he came into town for the avowed purpose of giving a rapid rush to Miss Irene Whitney. My name is Peter Chambers,

and I am neither as young, handsome, unsubtle or rich as Yale, but I was in there pitching too. This was Miss Whitney's second night in the employ of the Long-Malamed, and I'd been there both nights.

"Drink?" I said.

"Not with the boss sitting at the other end of the bar," Irene said.

Two men were seated at the far end. The one nearer to the archway was pale, slender and immaculately attired. He handled his drink with delicate fingers. He had straight white hair, parted in the middle, and neatly combed. He looked on the good side of sixty. The other was perhaps fifteen years his junior, a small man, a rugged little man with a ruddy sun-creased neck and a face as pink as the shrimp-fed flamingos at Hialeah. They seemed in the midst of a gentlemanly argument, the slender man's voice quiet and modulated, the small man's intense and rasping.

"Which one?" I said to Tobias.

"The one with the white hair. He's Joe Malamed."

"Who's the other one?"

"Remember Frankie Hines? Used to be a top jockey. Top jockey in the whole country. Don't tell me you don't remember Frankie Hines?"

Sure I remembered Frankie Hines. "That," I said, "was a long time ago. I thought he was dead, or something."

"Ain't dead nohow. Retired. Got a million enterprises. Got more loot than King Midas. Who the hell, Mr.

Chambers, was this King Midas, anyway?"

I sipped and I smiled at Tobias Eldridge. Tobias was an old friend who had worked many of the top bars in our city of New York, as had I, except I was generally on the other side of the stick from Tobias. He was tall and thin with a shock of black hair falling over his forehead. He had a long inquisitive nose, a young face, and the knowing, old, ageless eyes that are the special prerequisite of bartenders born to be bartenders.

"King Midas?" I said. "A myth. Everything he touched turned to gold."

"That's Frankie," said Tobias. "Frankie Hines is loaded."

"Loaded," Irene said, "reminds me of the customers in the back room. They should be in the mood now for the cute little pandas, purveyed by yours truly, don't you think?"

"I think," I said.

Irene went to her check-room and I watched, appreciatively, as her hands went up over her head, attaching the strap about her neck. She came out bearing the tray of cigarettes and the pandas, winked at me, and proceeded with undulant grace through the archway and into the darkened room.

"You going in to see the show, Mr. Chambers?" Tobias asked. "It's going on any minute."

I was about to answer when Joe Malamed rapped on the bar for Tobias' attention. Tobias moved off, stumping the wooden bridge behind

the bar, and refilled Malamed's glass.

The argument stepped up a notch, audible to me.

"Look," Joe Malamed said to Hines, "I owe you the dough and I admit it. But you're making a pest of yourself. Quit hounding me, and you'll get-paid faster."

Frankie Hines said, "If I quit hounding you, I'll never get paid. And I'm sick and tired of waiting." He opened his knees and got off his stool. "If you want me to put the squeeze on, Joe, I got friends what can squeeze."

Malamed smiled up at Tobias. "Now he's threatening me."

"I beg your pardon," said Tobias, blandly.

"Nothing," Malamed said. "Forget it. And you forget it too, Frankie boy. You'll be paid inside a week. Now go in and enjoy the show."

"Can I sit at your wife's table?"

"Be my guest," Malamed said. "She's sitting with our book critic friend, Charles Morse, and a few other people. You know Charley?"

Frankie Hines had already disappeared into the darkness through the archway. Tobias returned to me.

"What's the hassle?" I said.

"Search me. When it's the boss who's in an argument, the bartender wears earlaps. You know how it is, Mr. Chambers."

The M.C.'s voice came through from the darkened room.

". . . and now, ladies and gentlemen, Calvin Cole . . . the great Cal-

vin Cole . . . the one and only . . . in an Afro-Cuban fantasy on the drums . . . assisted by Manaja . . . the dancing dervish." Now he made his joke. "*Hold on to your pockets, ladies and gentlemen. Darkness will descend upon the room. Total darkness.*" His voice rose to a high pitch. "*Calvin Cole . . . and Manaja.*"

All the lights went out. A tiny spot played on the glistening features of Calvin Cole as he rapped out his rhythms against the skin-tight drums he held between his knees.

"You going to watch?" Tobias said.

"What have I got to lose?"

I found a place just inside the archway, leaning against the wall, holding my drink. Now, lightning from the spot hit the stage in garish waves as Manaja began her torso-flinging performance. Her copper body had been rubbed with oil, reflecting the bursting flashes of light . . . light and darkness . . . light and darkness. I watched for some five minutes and then I went back into the gloom of the cocktail lounge. Tobias Eldridge was in the check-room, feet up like a banker, smoking.

"What's with you?" I asked. "You quit?"

"Resting," he said. Nobody at the bar except Mr. Malamed. Everybody watching Calvin and that Manaja. Wow, that Manaja! I got a needle for that Manaja."

I extended my glass. "Let's freshen this up, huh?"

Tobias sighed, ground out the

cigarette in a sea-shell ashtray and stood up. "Okay. I'm ready." He stretched languidly. "That Manaja!" He walked behind the bar.

"I'll take Whitney."

He grinned. "So would I. If I could."

Mr. Joe Malamed had his arms crossed on the bar. His head nestled in his arms.

Tobias reached behind him for a bottle, and I moved to Mr. Malamed.

"I'm buying," I said, "as long as it's so lonely out here."

Mr. Malamed made no answer.

I touched him. His head moved.

Blood made a bright red trickle on the white bar.

Tobias Eldridge gulped a brandy but it did nothing for the pallor of his face.

"This guy's dead," I said.

The lights went on in the inner room. Ruth Benson, the chanteuse, came on, singing her naughty songs.

"Dead?" Tobias said. "You sure?"

"One little bullet. Clean through the temple. I'm sure."

"One little bullet," Tobias said in wonderment. "One lousy little bullet." His voice reached up to falsetto. "Why, the guy was just sitting here, just sitting here with a drink . . ."

The first one out was Irene Whitney.

She saw what I held in my hands, and screamed. Piercingly.

Ruth Benson's song stopped. People poured out of the inner room. Screams topped screams. The men

made a rush for the check-room, grabbing at coats. The cocktail lounge swarmed with hysteria.

I dropped Malamed back on the bar and fought through to the thick glass doors. I shot the bolt, locking the doors, and then I turned and spread my arms out wide like a young cop trying to hold up the pandemonium of onrushing traffic.

"All right," I yelled. "Everybody. Quiet. *Quiet.*"

A young man in a tuxedo, dragging his coat, rushed me, trying to get out. I wound up a fist and caught him as he came. He went down clean. It helped. The noise simmered down to bubbling sounds.

"Quiet," I yelled. "Shut up, everybody."

Suddenly there was absolute silence. The women stared at me, goggle-eyed. The men stared at me exactly like the women.

"All right," I said. "A guy's been murdered. Nobody leaves till the cops come. That clear?"

There was no argument.

"Fine," I said. "Now all you guys start putting your coats back into the check-room. And somebody get this drunk in front of me off the floor."

Somebody did. Some of the men moved to the check-room and hung their coats back.

I said: "All right. Now all of you go back to your tables. All of you go back where you were."

The crowd began to thin out. I said: "Any music in the house?"

A woman's voice came back at me. "Yes."

"Well, get them playing, will you?"

The woman's voice called, "Stan, get the boys together. Start them playing."

"Right, Mrs. Malamed. Right you are. Okay, boys. Let's go. On the double."

Soon there was music, soft strain.

"Okay," I said. "Everybody back in place. Nobody comes in, nobody goes out. Till we get the cops."

A young man, a guy with broad shoulders and black hair, shouldered through to me. "Thanks," he said. "Thanks a lot."

"Who are you?"

"Melvin Long, Joe Malamed's partner."

"Well, get them back to their tables, Melvin. Get them all back to where they were."

"You're Chambers, aren't you? Peter Chambers?"

"How do you know?"

"Seen you around."

"Okay. Now get them back, huh? Get them all back."

Soon enough the coats were back in the check-room and the customers were back in their chairs. Nobody remained in the cocktail lounge except Malamed, head-down on the bar near the archway, Tobias rigid near the brandy bottle behind the bar, Irene Whitney near the check-room, and Melvin Long nervously rubbing his hands directly in front of me.

"You too," I said. "You and Miss Whitney. Back there exactly where you were."

Long said, "He's right, Irene. Come on. You were out on the floor."

He led her through the archway and now I was alone with Tobias. I left my station at the glass doors and went to the bar. I said, "One for you, one for me, and then you call the cops."

I had scotch neat.

He had brandy.

Then he reached down, brought up the phone, stuck a trembling forefinger in the slot marked O, and whirled the dial.

II

Fifteen minutes later, Detective Lieutenant Parker and his gang of experts from Headquarters held class in the Long-Malamed. Parker, out of Homicide, was a straight cop with no curves. He was squat and solid and built like a beer barrel. He had a square jowl, crew-cut black hair, strong white teeth and black eyes. Parker had a respect for his fellow men, excepting criminals, and including private eyes. Detective Lieutenant Louis Parker, Homicide, New York City, was an old and valued friend. Under his capable supervision a good deal of work was accomplished in a comparatively short period of time.

Louis Parker summed it up: "The guy was killed from a bullet shot from the inside room. What with the drum raps and the light flashes,

the pistol shot went unnoticed. He was killed by a thirty-eight. He was a sitting duck, a perfect target, out in the light of the cocktail lounge, near enough to the archway. Nobody saw anybody with a gun, they were all watching that oiled-up Manaja. Pretty gorgeous, that Manaja. And everybody's accounted for. I mean, everybody was seated at his respective table, nobody went to the john or nothing. This eliminates quite a group."

"Why?" I said.

"Because I've got experts, and they've got instruments that measure. Now, from the trajectory of the bullet and the angle of entrance into the temple, considered in conjunction with the particular shape of the room ——"

"Trajectory," I said, my eyebrows up in admiration. "Real fancy."

"Means the curve described by a body moving through space — the body, in this case, being a bullet discharged from a thirty-eight. Anyway, it eliminates a goodly group, and places in jeopardy only those within the segment from whence the shot could have been fired."

"Whence," I said. "Brother, what are our cops coming to?"

"The room seats two hundred and eight. And it was filled to capacity. But within our circle of jeopardy — only two tables: that of Mrs. Joe Malamed, and a table seating a party of six, visitors in from San Francisco, with not the remotest acquaintance-ship with Joe Malamed."

"That narrows it down plenty, doesn't it?"

"And how it does." Parker turned to one of his uniformed minions. "Okay, let them go now. They get their coats out of the check-room and blow. Take the names, occupations, addresses. Have them show identification." He consulted a card. "The ones that stay are Claire Malamed, Melvin Long, Charles Morse, Frank Hines, and Ruth Benson."

"Why do they stay?" I asked.

"Because they were the ones seated at Mrs. Malamed's table during Calvin Cole's performance." He called to the cop again. "It's okay for Morse, Hines and Long to get their hats and coats. That whole crew's going downtown with us."

They lined up at the check-room like an impatient queue at the box office of a hit show. The men obtained their hats and coats, took the arms of their girl friends, and hurried the hell out through the heavy glass doors.

I found a spot near Parker at the bar and I said, "Is it all right if I have a drink?"

"Sure. And I want to thank you for the way you handled this, Pete. Nice job, locking the doors and keeping them here."

"Scotch," I said to Tobias. To Parker: "How does it look?"

"Stinks," he said.

"But why?"

"First, no gun. No weapon. Nothing in sight, and this is a big joint. Second, these." He brought up a

pair of old leather gloves. "Found them right by the archway. Dropped during the excitement after Whitney screamed. They don't belong here, do they? Don't belong in a snooty night club, a pair of broken-down, grimy, ordinary leather gloves."

"No, they don't."

"Whoever did this job, planned it," "You shoot off a gun, you get nitrate impregnations in your palm. You wear leather gloves, the impregnations remain in the gloves. These pair fit a man or a woman. Where does that leave me?"

"You can trace gloves, can't you?"

"You ought to know better than that, Pete. With you I don't have to make like a sherlock. These are an ordinary pair of leather gloves purchased, maybe, easy, six months ago. Thousands of stores sell them to hundreds of thousands of customers right across the counter. We'll make the routine try, of course, but it don't figure."

"You're so right, Lieutenant."

"Now we're taking that bunch from Mrs. Malamed's table downtown for a fast paraffin test for disclosure of nitrates in the palm. We'll find nothing." He tapped the gloves. "We'll find it all here."

"What about prints? On the gloves?"

"Whoever was smart enough to figure the gloves was smart enough not to get prints on the gloves."

"Stinks," I said, "is right."

I drank part of my drink and turned toward the check-room. Most

of the clients of the Long-Malamed had already vacated. Frankie Hines got his coat and hat and tipped Irene a dollar.

"Well, thank you," Irene said.

Hines and Melvin Long, wearing their coats, joined us at the bar and ordered drinks from Tobias. The next in line at Irene's check-room was a tall, distinguished man of about thirty-five, with grey temples, curly dark hair, light blue eyes and a thin mustache.

"Charles Morse," the man said to the cop with the notebook. "Book critic." He showed identification, then he handed his check to Irene. She helped him with the coat, accepted his tip.

"What's the address?" the cop said.

"Fifteen East Nineteenth."

"Thanks," the cop said. "You stay."

"Yes. I know."

Morse moved toward us at the bar, shoving his hands deep into the pockets of his dark blue coat.

Suddenly, he froze.

A grimace grew on his mouth.

"What's the matter?" Parker called.

Morse's right hand came out of his coat pocket. It held a gun. A nickel-plated, pearl-handled revolver that looked like a thirty-eight. I heard a gasp. I turned. Melvin Long's face had gone whiter than a napkin at the Waldorf.

Parker and Frank Hines rushed at Morse. Parker used a handkerchief

and took the revolver out of Morse's hand.

"This yours?" Parker said.

"No. Of course not."

"What's it doing in your pocket?"

"I wish I knew."

Parker squinted down at the gun and an unhappy smile widened his mouth. "This looks like it." He wrapped it in the handkerchief and handed it to a cop. "You sure?" he said to Morse.

"Sure I'm sure. Look, Lieutenant, I wouldn't kill a man, then put the gun in my own coat pocket, then come up with it and display it to you. Now, would I?"

"No. You wouldn't." Parker said. "Figures during that excitement around the checkroom, everybody grabbing for coats, somebody shoved that gun into the first available coat pocket. That's the way it figures." He sighed, and his voice came up. "All right. Everybody on my list, let's go."

Fingers squeezed my arm. Melvin Long said, "I want to talk to you."

"Now?"

"As soon as I can."

"Now you're heading for downtown."

"I know. But as soon as possible after that. Where?"

"You know Schmattola's?"

"Yes."

"I'm always there after curfew."

"After curfew? I said as soon as possible."

"By the time they get through with you, it'll be after curfew."

"All right, Mr. Chambers. Wait for me. Please."

"Check," I said.

Parker called: "Let's go, everybody. Come on. Come on."

III

Ernie Schmattola's Pizza Parlor was located on Forty-ninth Street off Sixth Avenue. Ernie had figured out a deal and it had paid off. Ernie had been born in Naples but he was more New York than New York. He knew the town, he breathed the town, he loved the town, he lived the town. Where most restaurants opened at about eleven in the morning and closed at about eleven at night, Ernie opened at eleven at night and closed at eleven the next morning. There are a good many late birds in New York who get hungry at the most inappropriate hours, and these are the birds that Ernie served. Schmattola's was always crowded, giving a view of a cross-section of the populace, from the parasites of low syndicate to the paragons of high society.

Schmattola's was a mass of many rooms, with scurrying waiters and the thrum of constant and overlapping conversation. The cooks in the kitchen were the best in the land, as were the prohibitive prices which prohibited, it seems, nobody. Ernie himself was a squat man, the shape of a butter tub and with the strut of a penguin. He was swarthy with dark, beady, humorous eyes, and he was the soul of compassion.

To his friends he served, on call, compassionate after-hour drinks in reminiscent tea-cups. I was a friend.

He met me at the door and I said, "I want privacy, Ernie. I want privacy, a double scotch, water, white bread and ravioli."

"It's my pleasure, Mr. Chambers."

"I'm expecting a friend. He'll ask for me."

"It's my pleasure, Mr. Chambers."

He took me to a nook away from the crowd. I sipped my scotch, sniffed my ravioli, and dug in. I began to think about the Long-Malamed. Of the people at the table of jeopardy, as Parker had so quaintly put it, I had seen Frankie Hines (of whom I knew by past bright reputation), I had seen Charles Morse (of whom I knew by present unblemished reputation), and I had spoken with Melvin Long. I had not even seen Mrs. Claire Malamed, or if I had, I didn't know who she was. Ruth Benson I had observed singing from afar at various clubs about the town. So much for the cast of characters.

I had finished the ravioli and was mopping up the plate with the wonderful white bread when Ernie ushered Melvin Long to my table.

I said, "Something?"

"Can I get a drink?"

"It might be arranged."

"I need one. Gin and tonic."

"That's too fancy for here. You can have gin, in a tea-cup."

"Gin. In a tea-cup."

I nodded at Ernie.

"How was it downtown?" I asked.

"Pretty lousy."

"They find anything?"

"They found nothing. All of us responded negative to the test. We were all sent home."

"I see. Now what's with the urgent conversation with me?"

He squirmed around in his seat like he was sitting at a concert and didn't like music. Then he blurted, "That was my gun."

"What?"

"The gun that Charles Morse produced, it was my gun, I'd swear it."

"Your gun?"

"A shining, nickel-plated, thirty-eight calibre revolver, with a pearl-type handle. There aren't too many around like that."

"Look, pal. Did you kill Joe Malamed?"

"No."

We sat in silence and stared across at one another. He seemed a nice enough guy, about twenty-eight, with glistening black well-combed hair, scared brown eyes, dark cheeks closely shaven to a blue sheen, and long white fidgety fingers with buffed nails.

I said, "Why do you think it's your gun?"

"Because I had one exactly like that. It disappeared."

"Got a license for the gun?"

"Yes."

"How'd it disappear?"

"I don't know. It was in my apartment. Then it wasn't."

"Any idea who hooked it?"

"Any one of perhaps five hundred people."

"Do that a little slow for me, will you, pal?"

"I have a penthouse suite on Central Park South. Two days ago, I had a cocktail party, and it was open house. People came and people went. You know how it is."

"Yeah," I said.

"Here's the truth, Mr. Chambers. When it comes to guns — any kind of firearms — I'm a bust. I have a phobia about guns. I may have fired a gun at targets maybe three times in all my life, and each time I was scared to death."

"Then how come you own one?"

"I got it as a gift. I . . . I sort of liked it, made me feel good, that sort of thing. I got a license for it, and kept it around the apartment — for protection, sort of, though I don't think that's the real reason."

"What would the real reason be?"

"I don't know. Made me a big man with a gun. Blew up my ego in some cockeyed kind of way." His smile was wan.

"All right, then, Melvin —"

"My friends call me Mel."

"Okay, Mel. Just what do you want me to do for you?"

"I want to retain you — right now — to discover who murdered Joe Malamed."

"Don't you think the cops can do it?"

"That's just what I'm afraid of. I'll wind up as their pigeon. Guns can be traced, can't they?"

"I take it you didn't mention any of this to Lieutenant Parker."

"No. I didn't mention it. Will you handle it, Mr. Chambers?"

"Did you kill him, Mel?" I asked again.

"No, I didn't."

"Okay. I'll handle it. But I'll tell you right now, if it develops that you're it, I turn you in, pal, *and* I keep the fee." I tried a smile. "It's what you call ethics."

He took out a folding check book and a small ball-point pen and he scribbled and he scraped the check from the pad and handed it over. It was for one thousand dollars. I like rich clients.

"Fine," I said and folded the check and put it away. "One question. About you and Joe Malamed."

His face puckered. "Yes?"

"How'd you get along, you and Joe — say, as of yesterday?"

He looked for more gin in the tea-cup. There was no more gin in the tea-cup. "I'd rather not discuss that."

"Suit yourself. You're the client." What the hell — it would be easy to find out.

"Where'll I be able to reach you, Mr. Chambers? I mean —"

"I've got an office, but I'm almost never there. I'm up nights and sleep days, mostly. Here. Here at Schmat-tola's. From curfew till the sun starts coming up, you figure to find me here."

"Swell."

He stood up and rubbed his hands. "Okay if I leave now?"

“Not at all. Leaving myself. Hang on till I pay the check, and I’ll ride up a way with you.”

IV

The next day I made the bank by a whisker and deposited his check. It was a day of high wind and everybody looked healthy. I fought the wind to a theatrical-type store and made a purchase that put a dent in my new fee. I fought the wind again to the Long-Malamed. I didn’t take a cab. You’ve got to do something for your lungs occasionally.

There’s nothing more dreary than a night club before it opens, except a graveyard in a fog. The Long-Malamed smelled of yesterday’s cigarette smoke and today’s disinfectant. One bright light cast long and frightening shadows. Tobias was behind the bar vigorously putting sparkle to the cocktail glasses.

“Hello, Mr. Chambers,” he said. “You’re a little previous. We ain’t serving yet.”

“You’re serving him, aren’t you?” I pointed to the back of a man at the end of the bar.

“He’s special.”

“Is he?”

The man turned around. It was Louis Parker.

“Special enough, Tobias. My apologies.” I placed my flat package down on the bar and went to Parker. I said, “How goes it, Lieutenant?”

“Not too good. What brings you pub-crawling this early?”

“Same brings you, I imagine.”

“You mean you cajoled a client out of this mess?”

“That’s the truth, Lieutenant.”

“Who?”

“Confidential, but I’ve got a hunch you’ll know sooner than you think.”

“We’re not going to cross wires, are we, Pete?”

“With other guys in the Department — maybe. But not with you, Louis.”

“Thanks.”

“How goes it?”

“Stinks.”

“The gloves?”

“Just the way I figured. Absolutely nothing.”

“The gun?”

“Only prints are Charles Morse’s, which is as it should be, since he handled it taking it out of his pocket. The rest were smudges.”

“Pretty smart.”

“Smarter than you think. I had one angle. I figured that would do it for me.”

“What was that, Lieutenant?”

“All our suspects furnished us with specimens of their prints. Voluntarily, of course, but on request.”

“But if the gun had no useful prints, and the gloves had nothing — what’d you need the specimens for?”

“My angle. Any guesses about my angle?”

“Nope. I’m dull this afternoon.”

“There’s stuff people forget, when they’re not too smart.”

“Such as?”

“Such as you leave no prints when

you wear gloves and no nitrate particles hit your palm — but what people frequently forget is that prints can be left *inside* the gloves. Check?"

"You're a cutie, Lieutenant."

"Well, whoever pulled this was cuter. They made sure to rub the fingerprints off the gloves, so nothing showed." He shrugged. "Smart operator, Petie. Real smart. It'll be a pleasure to nab him. Or her."

"Trace the gun yet?"

"We're working on that."

"Good luck."

"Thanks." He got off the stool, went to the door, said, "Keep in touch," and left.

"Nice man," said Tobias.

"The best. How's about an eyep opener?"

"Only for you, Mr. Chambers. On the house." He poured.

I raised the glass. "First today."

The doors swung and Irene Whitney entered, pert in a neat blue suit and rosy with the wind.

"First today," I said at Irene Whitney.

She made a prim face. "Anybody who drinks before nightfall is a drunk."

"That's me," I said, and knocked it down. It burned and I shuddered. "Got a present for you."

"For me?" said Tobias.

"For her," I said.

"Naturally," said Tobias.

Irene hovered while I unwrapped the package. Her perfume was lovely. "Oh," she said with enough enthusiasm to equal the purchase price.

"Opera-length nylons! Long, wonderful lace nylons." She looked at me with real affection, kissed my cheek. "You're a thoughtful kind of guy." She kissed me again.

"You'll leave marks on his face," Tobias said.

"Let *me* worry," I said, "about marks on my face."

Irene leaned toward Tobias. "How's she taking it?" she said softly. "Mrs. Malamed."

"Like a trooper." He inclined his head toward the inner room. "She's inside, setting things up for tonight."

"If she asks for me, I'm upstairs, getting into my uniform." Her wonderful teeth shone in a smile. "Uniform, I call it." She took up the package. "Thanks, Peter."

"Date for tonight? You've got your bribe."

"It's no bribe and you know it. Boy, how these men try to talk tough! Pick me up at closing?"

"You bet."

"Date for tonight." She went to the stairway, called back to Tobias: "Ruth here yet?"

"Upstairs."

She ran up the stairs. I watched her legs. Then I turned back to Tobias. "How's it set up, up there?"

"Joe Malamed's room in the rear, Claire Malamed's room in the front, a couple of toilets, and one room, in the middle, for acts to dress in."

"I get it. Now about this Frankie Hines."

"You mean that big typhoon?"

"Typhoon?"

"Retired rich guy?"

"Tycoon."

"Yeah, tycoon."

"I'm going to want to talk with him. Where do I find him? You know?"

"This time of day, you figure to reach him at the coffee pot."

"The what?"

"Coffee pot."

"What coffee pot, Tobias?"

"One of the enterprises of the typhoon is a little coffee pot over on Fifty-second by Seventh. It's called The Horseshoe. It's easy to find. It's the one with no customers. I think that Frankie just keeps it to have a little hangout for himself, maybe a hot meal sometimes when he's hungry."

He looked over my shoulder, and went back to polishing glasses. A young woman came up to us. She said, "I'm sorry, but we're not serving yet." She looked at the shot glass near me, and then she looked at Tobias. Tobias said, "He's a cop."

"Cop?"

"Private," I said.

Tobias said, "Mr. Chambers, Peter Chambers — Mrs. Claire Malamed."

"Well . . ." I said. "Well . . ."

"May I ask why you're staring, Mr. Chambers?"

"Well . . ." I said. "Uh . . . I didn't expect . . . someone quite as young . . ." Lamely I added: "And beautiful."

Beautiful she was. And young she

was. About twenty-five, I figured, with blue eyes, and a white skin like the inside of an apple, and pouting red lips, and clean sweeping eyebrows, and blonde blonde hair piled over her head in beautiful waves that shone like gold in the harsh white light. Her voice was low, deep, musical.

"Young?" she said. "I'm twenty-seven. I was married to Mr. Malamed for two years. We were quite happy. I've told all of this to Lieutenant Parker, but if there are any other vital statistics that I can supply, I'd be most happy."

"No," I said. "No, thank you."

"Then, if you'll excuse me, I have many things to attend to, Mr. Chambers . . ."

"Yes, of course, Mrs. Malamed . . ."

She looked from the shot glass, to me, to Tobias, turned and walked off toward the inner room. She was almost as good from the back as from the front.

"Tell her I left," I said to Tobias.

"What?"

"Tell her I left."

"Aren't you?"

"No. I'm leaving you, but I'm not leaving. I'm going" — I pointed — "upstairs."

I put a twenty on the bar. "Now, kindly don't be insulted. This is business, a business deduction. It's for you to say — in case of emergency — that I said goodbye, started for the doors, that you turned your back and went to work on the glasses.

If I happened to sneak back — how would you know?”

“But Mr. Chambers . . .”

“Take the twenty, Tobias. I’m going up to talk to Irene.”

I went. But I didn’t go to Irene. I by-passed the middle room, and the toilets, and I didn’t go to the back room. I went to the front room, which turned out to be a lavishly-furnished, large studio room with slanting glass facing north for a ceiling. I mosied. I peeked. I searched. I poked. I made like a hundred percent private eye hot on the trail of nothing. In a drawer of a dressing table I found a jewel box. When I lifted the top, it opened to three stuck-out compartments like a little step ladder. There was a good deal of gleaming junk in it, some of it quite expensive. In the lower compartment there was a flat velvet box. It contained a large gold medal about three inches across and about a half inch thick. I took it out and examined it. Just from its weight it must have been worth three-four hundred dollars. One side of it had engraved crossed pistols, beneath that the initials C.M. The reverse side said *Target Club Competition, First Prize, June 15, 1952*. I slipped the medal into my pocket, shut the velvet box, put it back into the jewel case, closed that and stuffed it back into the drawer. I tried another drawer. A voice behind me said:

“Looking for something special, Mr. Chambers?”

I twisted around. Claire Malamed had a black automatic in her hand and a funny look in her eye.

“No,” I said. “Nothing special.”

“Get out of here. Quickly, please.”

“I’m not finished yet, Mrs. Malamed.”

“You’re finished.” The automatic dipped and came up again.

I began to move toward her. “I’ve been retained to look into Mr. Malamed’s murder. That’s what I’m doing here, looking into Mr. Malamed’s murder.”

“You’re trespassing.”

“Am I?”

“Get out, and get out quickly.” Her soft voice moved up a peg. “And don’t come a step nearer to me.”

I kept walking. Toward her. “I don’t think you’ll pull that trigger.”

“Won’t I, though? I’m within my rights, and you know it.”

“I’m gambling you don’t.”

“Don’t come near me.”

I didn’t stop. I lost my gamble.

She pulled at the trigger. I saw the knuckle of her forefinger go white with pressure.

Nothing happened.

She squeezed at it again.

Nothing happened again.

I was near enough. I slapped the gun from her hand and picked it up. I looked at it, emptied the clip and threw the gun on a divan.

“Automatics don’t shoot,” I said, “with the safety catch on.”

I tried for a short, curt, military bow, and I got out of there.

V

The Horseshoe was a narrow white-walled slot set in between a huge dour warehouse and a clip joint with strippers. There was a narrow plastic-topped eating bar with six fixed oscillating stools, two little tables and a telephone booth. Nothing more. There was no room for anything more. The only customer was the boss, seated at one of the stools, a thick-mugged cup of coffee in front of him. He was speaking to the counter-man, tall and very slender, wrapped in a white apron and wearing a white overseas-style hat. The counter-man's eyes were squinting in agitated grief, and his Adam's apple had more jumps than the navel of a belly-dancer.

"This is the pay-off," Frankie Hines was saying. "When a man don't like the coffee in his own coffee pot, maybe it's time to change up the help around here."

"But, Mr. Hines! I just made that coffee ten minutes ago."

"What'd you use to make it with? Buckshot?"

I coughed. I said, "Mr. Hines?"

Frankie whirled around. "Yeah? What's it to you?"

"My name's Peter Chambers."

"Oh, yeah, yeah. The hero of the Long-Malamed. The private eye. Yeah, yeah." He looked at me coldly. "What do you want here?"

"Talk."

"With me?"

"If you please, Mr. Hines."

"What can we talk about?"

"Let's talk and find out, huh? Let's try. How about one of these little tables?"

"Sure thing."

He moved and we sat at one of the tables. I said, "I've been retained, privately, on that Joe Malamed thing."

"Yeah?"

"You're one of the suspects, Mr. Hines."

"Not me, fella. They gave me that paraffin job down there, and I came out clean."

"So did everyone else. Which sets you all up as suspects again."

He contemplated that. "You know," he said. "You got something there." Then he smiled. "Only with me" — shrug — "no motive."

"There's a question about that."

"Is there?"

"Did you tell the police, Mr. Hines, about your argument with Mr. Malamed?"

"Now look here —"

"Did you tell them that you threatened him?"

"Now look, fella —"

"I didn't either, Mr. Hines."

He sat back, a little man with shrewd eyes, and a sun-baked wrinkled face. "Why?" he said. "Why didn't you?"

"Because, I'm not put together that way. I don't put a man on the spot, unless the spot fits. I don't know, yet, about you."

"Thanks. You're a right guy."

"Do we talk, Mr. Hines?"

"You bet your saddle boots we

do, Mr. — Mr. — what did you say your name was.”

“Peter Chambers.”

“You bet your boots we do, Pete. You ask the questions, pal.”

“What was the argument about?”

He brought out cigarettes, offered one to me, and we smoked. “Two months ago,” he said, “down in Florida, he went for a bundle on the hayburners. He didn’t want to wire to New York for more cabbage — didn’t want his wife to know he got cleaned. I lent him fifteen G’s.”

“Fifteen thousand dollars? Just like that?”

“Oh, I took his I.O.U. and there was a nice little piece of change for a bonus. Now, when I come back up north and present my marker, he keeps stalling me.”

“Maybe he couldn’t afford to pay?”

“He could afford it, all right.”

“How would you know?”

“There’s a lot of things I know, Mr. Chambers. I know that night club was a paying proposition. I know he lived high, wide and handsome. I know he carried two hundred thousand dollars worth of insurance for that young wife of his. And I know, only last week, he bought a five thousand dollar mink coat.”

“For his wife?”

“His wife is *got* a mink coat. No. For that doll, the singer, Ruth Whatever-her-name-is. I ain’t good at names, Mr. . . . Mr. . . .”

“Quite a guy, Mr. Joe Malamed.”

“And his partner didn’t like no part of that.”

“Melvin Long?”

“Yeah, Melvin. You want to know why?”

“I do.”

“Because that Melvin’s crazy about that chick. You know her, Ruthie?”

“No, I don’t. By the way, did you attend Long’s cocktail party a few days ago?”

“Bet your saddle boots I did. What a shindig. Why?”

“Just asking. You know a hell of a lot about these people, don’t you?”

“Know a hell of a lot more, but right now I ain’t talking. I got a fifteen-thousand-dollar investment to protect. I’m going to make one last pitch for it tonight. If I don’t get it — stand by for a load of information that’ll have your ears buzzing. Where you going to be later on?”

“Tell you in a minute.” I looked at my watch. “Hold it, huh?”

I got up and went to the phone books hanging from a hook near the booth. I checked Charles Morse’s number, and I called him. I explained the situation and asked him if I could come over for a chat. He was very cordial, informed me that he would be at home, working, for the remainder of the afternoon, and that I would be welcome at any time. I thanked him, hung up and went out to Frankie.

I said, “I’ll be on the town for maybe an hour or two. After that, home until midnight. That okay?”

"Fine. What's the phone number?"

I wrote out my phone number and gave it to him.

"Fine," he said, "fine. I got a hunch if I spill my information, you're going to have your killer, Mr. . . . Mr. . . ."

"Chambers." I took back the sheet and wrote my name over the number. "Just so you don't forget," I said.

"You're going to have your killer, or you're going to come pretty close. That's my hunch, Peter."

"I hope you're right. What's wrong with right now for the information?"

"Got an investment to protect."

"It's up to you, Frankie."

"It's always up to Frankie."

I left him working up a new head of steam about the coffee for the counterman.

VI

Fifteen East Nineteenth Street is near enough to Two Forty Centre Street, which is Police Headquarters. Louis Parker operated out of Headquarters so I dropped in on him first and found him desk high in paper work.

"Don't ask me how goes it," he said, "because the answer is the same. It stinks."

"Nothing new?"

"I told you ballistics proved up the murder gun, didn't I?"

"You didn't, but I assumed as much."

"You got anything for me, Pete?"

"Not yet. Not anything new."

Parker scrubbed at his head. He looked down at a sheet in front of him. "What have we got? We got it narrowed down to one table. What have we got there?"

"Claire Malamed, Charles Morse, Ruth Benson, Frank Hines, Melvin Long. Whodunit, Professor?"

He scrubbed harder. "Search me. The wife? Why should she? She's sitting pretty, married to a very rich man. The book critic? Why should he? Plus he wouldn't plant the murder gun in his own pocket. The singer? Why should she? What would she have to gain? The ex-jockey? Don't figure, he was an old friend. The partner? Why should he? Plus he's supposed to have a phobia about guns. He says. What a mess, huh?"

"What about the gun?"

"No prints except what supposed to be on it. The rest, just smudges."

"You told me that too, Louis. I mean have you traced it yet?"

He wrinkled his eyes at me. "You keep bothering me with that one question. Why?"

"Just asking, Louis."

"Just asking — why?"

"Well, a gun ought to be easy to trace."

"Ought it to be?" His hand slammed down on the desk. "Well, this one ain't. Nothing is easy in this miserable case."

"Good bye, Lieutenant. You're in no humor for casual chit-chat."

Charles Morse's studio was warm

and book-lined and thick-rugged. Charles Morse worked his cigarette through an ivory holder. He was lavish with his whiskey and that is always good by me.

"I've found the Long-Malamed a nice spot, Mr. Chambers," he said. "Strange as it may seem, a book critic works hard, and needs relaxation like anybody else."

"Yes. I presume so." I sipped excellent scotch.

"A good many of us are frustrated writers. And I'm one of those. Our creative abilities just don't measure up to our critical tastes." He deposited ash in a tray. "So — under the yoke of my permanent frustration — I'm a pretty good customer at drinking bars, and I've been an excellent customer of the Long-Malamed ever since it opened. Which brings me to the reply to your question. Yes, I know most of the people at the club fairly well."

"Was there — well, any disharmony — that you know of?"

"No — not really." His brows came together in thought and he flipped a fingernail at his mustache. He was a handsome man. "There was a bit of a controversy about a week ago, between Mr. Long and Mr. Malamed. The bartender, Tobias, was present at the time, and I was rather, well, an interested observer. Both men were drinking, and I wouldn't want to give it undue importance. But there was some sort of dispute."

"How did it wind up?"

"Mr. Malamed threatened Mr. Long, and Mr. Long laughed it off."

"*Malamed* threatened *Long*? Now there's a switch."

He smiled. "I didn't think it had any bearing on the case."

"Do you know what the argument was about?"

"It concerned a young lady. Ruth Benson. Do you know her? The young lady who sings."

"Yeah, Ruth Benson. Now what was the argument about, Mr. Morse?"

"I really don't know."

"I see." I set down the glass, uncrossed my legs, got up and we shook hands. "Thanks for your help, sir."

"Not at all, Mr. Chambers. I wasn't of any help really, I know that. But if there's anything I can do, at any time — please don't hesitate. I'm at the Long-Malamed practically every night."

"Thanks. Thanks, again."

I went home. I called my office for messages but my secretary was gone for the day. I thought about the fact that I was certainly giving Joe Malamed my exclusive interest. But then I had accepted a one grand fee to discover exactly who had knocked off Joe Malamed. I shrugged and took a bath.

I lay long and smoked many cigarettes, littering the bathroom floor. Then I got out, rubbed down, cleaned up the bathroom floor and shaved. I went to the bedroom and set the clock for eleven, and at

eleven it woke me. I yawned, went to shave, realized I had already shaved, went to the kitchen and raided the refrigerator. I cleaned up the dishes and dressed. I wore a formal navy blue suit because come what may on the Malamed thing, there was going to be a prize. I had a date with Miss Whitney come closing time.

I was at the door, going out, when the phone rang. I bulled back like a wrestler who suddenly discovers he's not in a fix. I caught the phone at its last ring.

"Hello," I said. "Hello."

"Hey. I thought you wasn't home."

"Who's this?"

"Frankie Hines."

"I'm glad you called."

"You're going to be gladder. Look, I'm in my joint, the Horseshoe. They ain't nobody here, no counter-man, no kitchen help, no nobody. I'm alone, and I'm waiting for you. I want to talk with you."

"Fine. I'll be right there."

"The faster the better. I been pushed around plenty, and I'm ready now for some pushing around on my own. I'll show —"

There were four shots.

I heard them as clearly as though I were there.

Then I heard a grunt that turned to a gasp, the sliding of a body along the phone booth wall, a thump, and the awful lonely knocking of a phone receiver, swinging, unheld.

I hung up and dialed Headquarters right away.

VII

When I got to the Horseshoe, it was teeming with cops, prowl cars askew at the curb, and a crowd already collected. I shoved through, got sass from a young cop, returned the sass but softly, explained who I was, and he ushered me in to Louis Parker, hat on back of his head, busy with details.

"You again?" Louis said without enthusiasm.

The young cop saluted. "He said he knows you, Lieutenant."

"Okay, okay," Louis said impatiently.

"Yes, sir," said the cop, saluting again, but not quite as smartly. He turned and went back into the street.

"This is a new wrinkle," Louis said. "I can't get called into a case without running into you."

"I called you, Louis."

"How's that?"

"I called you."

"You called me?" He was suddenly interested. His hat moved forward on his head. "How come?"

"I was talking to Hines when the shooting started."

"You mean you were here?"

"On the phone."

"How come?"

"He called me. At home."

"What about?"

"Something," I said, "about collecting fifteen thousand dollars that Joe Malamed owed him."

"We found an I.O.U. in his wallet for that amount. From Malamed,

to him. You mean he was going to retain you to try to collect?"

"Yeah. Something like that."

"What time was it?"

"About five to twelve. How'd he get it, Louis?"

"A forty-five. Three bullets."

"Trace the gun yet, Louis?"

"We just got here, for God's sake. Furthermore, there ain't no gun. Nobody kindly left a gun."

"I don't mean this gun. I mean the one that got Joe Malamed?"

He came very close to me. The hat went back on his head. He said very quietly: "What the hell is this extraordinary interest in our tracing that gun?"

"Just asking, Lieutenant."

"I don't believe you. What's that gun got to do with you?"

"Nothing, Louis."

"Something's tickling you about that gun, Pete. You want to tell me?"

"Nothing's tickling, Louis."

"Okay. Anything else you want to tell me? About this one here. This Frankie Hines."

"There's nothing else I know."

His face tightened. "I doubt that." Then he said: "Okay. Blow. I don't need you around here. I got work."

"Louis . . ." I said, aggrieved.

"Blow."

I blew. I walked across town and up to the Long-Malamed. The bar was loaded three deep. I gave my hat and coat to Irene and she returned a small wolf-whistle.

"Handsome tonight! All dressed

up in the blue serge, and all."

"Special for you, beautiful."

"Well, thanks."

"How's Yale?"

"Called me twice today. How many times did you call?"

"Who gave you nylons?"

She grinned, and the way she grinned, it's the sweetest thing that can happen to any face. "I'm wearing them."

I looked down and I loved it. Nylons are nylons, but nylons on Irene are the way that the guy that invented nylons dreamed that nylons should look, and he'd have to be a pretty good dreamer at that.

Customers with coats interrupted my reverie.

"See you," I said.

I called for my drink to Tobias, and it was handed to me in a relay of three bar-flies. The third was Charles Morse. "Nothing like a murder to stimulate business," he said. "Is there?"

"Nope." I took my drink. "What are you doing out here?"

"Can't get in back there. They're capacity."

I could hear Ruth Benson singing in the inner room.

"She almost finished?" I asked.

He listened. "Yes. This is her last song." He smiled. Sadly. "I know the routines here pretty well." He raised his glass. "Skool." We both drank.

"Melvin Long here?" I asked.

"He's somewhere in the rear."

"And Mrs. Malamed?"

"She was called downtown. Further police questioning. Those details never end."

"Lieutenant Parker?"

He shook his head. "This time it's the D.A.'s office."

"I want to talk with her myself, though, between you and me, I don't think she loves me overly. I want to talk with you some more too, and with Ruth Benson, and Melvin Long" — I looked about — "but this is no place to talk."

"Here she is now."

Ruth Benson came through to the cocktail lounge. She was tall and very dark, with a rich warm skin, an oval face, black up-tilted eyes, and black hair worn in a braid like a crown over her head.

"Excuse me," I said. I went to her. "Miss Benson?"

"Yes?"

"My name is Peter Chambers. I'm a private detective."

"So?"

"I've been retained on that Joe Malamed thing. Can I talk with you?"

"Of course."

"Can you get out for a few minutes?"

"I don't understand."

"If we could go somewhere where it's a little quieter . . ."

"Oh. Yes. If you wish."

She had a flat monotonous controlled voice. You couldn't tell what she was thinking from the way she talked. You couldn't tell from her expression either. Make-up covered

her face like a tarpaulin over a rainy infield. Her cheeks were smooth, powdered brown, her full lips were dark red with a purple cast, her eyelashes were long and heavy, and there was a shining dark cream over the lids. There were wrinkles at the corners of her eyes. She said, "Excuse me. I'll be with you in a moment."

She disappeared, and came back with a wrap. I decided to forego my hat and coat. I took her arm and we moved toward the door. Irene threw me a look that could kill at fifty paces, but I ducked. I pushed open the door, and the doorman opened a cab door for us. We went to Pete and Jerry's Patch on Fifty-seventh where it was quiet and we could talk. We took a back table. I ordered scotch and water. She ordered a double stinger. She removed her wrap. Her off-the-shoulder dress was of black satin, cut deep. Her shoulders were smooth and dark and her arms were slender but round. She leaned toward me. Her breasts were almost completely exposed, full and smooth and dark, and heaving.

"What is it, Mr. Chambers? What can I do for you?"

"I don't know. Yet. If you'll forgive me, I'll come right to the point."

"Please do."

"You know that I'm investigating Malamed's murder."

"So you told me."

"Two things, Miss Benson. If you don't want to answer, you can tell me to go fly a kite."

The waiter brought the drinks. She drank hers quickly.

"Two things, Mr. Chambers?"

"First, I've been informed that Joe Malamed recently purchased a mink coat. For you. Second, I heard that Malamed and Melvin Long had an argument. About you. Want to talk about any of that?"

Again she drank of the stinger. "Yes."

"Fine. Did you accept a mink coat from Malamed?"

"Yes."

"His wife know about this?"

"I don't think so."

"Want to talk more about it?"

"Yes, I do." She finished the drink, pushed the glass away. "I loved Joe Malamed."

I wove an aimless design of wet circles on the table with the bottom of my glass.

She said, "I know what you're thinking. I met Joe before he was married, in Miami. I went for him, hook, line and sinker. He went for me too. It was hot and heavy for a while, and then he met Claire. She came down as part of a chorus line, a cute kid from a rather good family. He made a big play for her. When I saw the way it was, I quit — I was working in his club at the time. I went to Havana, and then I took an engagement in Paris — Spivy's. When I got back to New York, they were married, and he'd bought the Long-Malamed with Melvin."

"And how was it between you, then, when you returned?"

"Bad as ever. Really just as bad."

"Even though he was married?"

She cried peculiarly. Her eyes were shaped so that the inside corners pointed downward. The tears were wet straight lines down her nose. She was crying bitterly, but her face remained the same, as did her voice. Only the quickened movements of her dark naked bosom showed her agitation.

"I loved Joe Malamed. And he loved me. I've been around a long time, Mr. Chambers. Joe was a complex man. It is very possible that he was deeply in love with Claire too. She's much younger than I am, and a far different type. I won't even say I was jealous." She paused and took a deep breath. "Maybe I've been around too long, but there's one thing I've learned in life. You can't have it all. Of anything. I loved Joe Malamed, and Joe loved me, and that was that, period."

I gave her my handkerchief and she dabbed at her face.

I said, "Do you think Claire knew?"

"I don't think so. I wouldn't care if she did. But I don't think so. Joe was too smart for that and, in a way, too kind."

"Do you think she loved him?"

"I wouldn't know. Really, I wasn't interested."

"But — I mean — the guy's wife?"

"The moral aspects are beyond me. Claire Malamed was something away, outside. Joe Malamed was for me, and whatever he did, he did —

I couldn't cut Joe away from me any more than I could cut my head off. If you disapprove, I don't give a damn. I'm giving you the facts, and I don't care how you feel about them. I'm telling you because it might help. I've never been vengeful, but whoever killed Joe Malamed — I want that person dead. I'd do it myself."

"I understand."

"I'm glad I'm working. I'm glad I can come in there and sing. I'd go crazy if I didn't. Working and . . ." She looked at the empty cocktail glass.

I waved to the waiter for refills.

"And Melvin Long? His argument with Malamed?"

"Oh, that."

"It might have some bearing, Miss Benson?"

"Do you think it could have been Melvin?"

"What do you think?"

"I don't know."

"What about the argument?"

The waiter brought the new drinks and took away the old glasses. Ruth Benson sipped, her black eyes shining over the rim of the glass.

"He's in love with me."

"Melvin?"

She sipped again, set the glass down. "Melvin. I could be his mother. I don't mean in years — but I could be his mother. A sweet, spoiled kid."

"Did Joe know?"

"He thought it was funny."

"Then why the argument?"

"Melvin had told Joe that I had been at his apartment. That riled Joe, for a minute, and they had words. Joe forgot it, fast."

"Joe threatened him. He was heard threatening him."

"Maybe he did. He might have told him he'd knock his teeth in, something like that, but I bet he forgot it ten minutes later."

"Did you know Frankie Hines?"

"Yes."

"Did you know that Joe owed Frankie fifteen thousand dollars?"

"Joe never welshed on a debt in his life."

"He was in the process of welshing on Frankie."

"That's a lie."

"Easy, Miss Benson. I happen to know that he owed Frankie the money, and that he was stalling on paying. And he could afford to pay."

"Right, Mr. Chambers. Right on both counts."

"Yet you say he never welshed a debt in his life."

"Right, there, too."

"Is that supposed to make sense?" I asked.

"You bet your life. Joe was down there, on a vacation, playing horses at Tropical. Joe was a big bettor, never threw it into the machines. He'd sit in the clubhouse and make last minute bets with a bookmaker. It would be too late to go into the machines to knock the price down. Many big bettors operate like that."

"I know that they do."

"He went for about sixty thousand dollars."

"What's that got to do with Frankie Hines?"

"Frankie was touting him."

"What does that mean?"

"Lots of big gamblers don't know too much about horses. They get a guy they trust, who knows the game, and they depend on his advice."

"I know that too."

"Frankie recommended the bookmaker."

"What's that got to do with Frankie's fifteen thousand?"

"Joe lost sixty thousand dollars. Then he borrowed fifteen from Frankie and he lost that too. That was enough. He had it. He came back north. Back here, a syndicate slob straightened him out, told him he'd been taken."

"How?"

"Frankie's bookmaker was a nobody, big flash, no protection, no organization. A shill. He and Frankie played footsie. They took Joe. Frankie gave Joe bum steers, Joe bet the bookmaker, and Frankie and the bookmaker split Joe's losings."

"How do you know all this?"

"Did you ever hear of Three-fingered Gray?"

"Yeah. Boss man in Miami."

"He's been sick. An old friend of Joe's. He's holed up in an estate in Orlando. Joe sent me down to Gray with the whole story. The bookmaker's name — the shill — is Sylvan Dell. Gray hauled him in. The guy

spilled his story. Gray was coming up here to see doctors. He was bringing Dell with him. They were due here this week. That's why Joe was stalling Frankie Hines. He didn't want to tip his hand until he could face him with this Sylvan Dell."

"I understand," I said. "Fully."

I sat back and drank scotch. She had stopped crying. She returned my handkerchief. The waiter came up and I paid the check. She had some stinger left, and she killed that. I had no scotch.

I said, "Just one little bit more, please."

"Sure."

"You said that Melvin had told Joe you were at his apartment. Was that true?"

"Yes, it was."

"Do you want to tell me about that?"

"Of course. The kid was beginning to give me a hard time, pawing around. I had to set him straight, but it was tough to do, working in the club. One night, last week, we had a few drinks together, and he asked me to come over to his place. I accepted, because I wanted to flatten that out once and for all. He's got a beautiful place, way up, overlooking the park. We had a few more drinks up there, and then he started making with the pitch out on the terrace. I stopped him, and I told him off."

"How'd he take it?"

"Not too good. He was practically feeling no pain at the time. He got

crazy-eyed, you know, all melodramatic. All of a sudden, he runs inside and comes back with a gun. Now he's going to kill himself, finish it off. You know these kids when they've got one too many in them. I talked him down, easy-like, and finally, I took the gun away from him. I never handled one of them in my life. I'm moving away from him, holding it, when all of a sudden, I must have touched something wrong. It went off."

"Anybody hurt?"

"I thought so for a moment."

"Why?"

"He dropped. I thought I'd shot him. I bent over him, and he was out, cold. I looked for blood, something, but he wasn't hurt. He'd just plain fainted, and me with that thing in my hand. I ran inside, put the gun in a drawer somewhere, under some things, and I brought out water. Nothing helped. I almost drowned him. He stayed out. Then I tried brandy. Finally—I must have poured a ton of brandy down his throat — he came to."

"He's got a phobia about guns."

"You're telling me." She looked at her watch. "I've got to get back. Is there anything else? Anything at all?"

"Nothing," I said. And then, without looking at her, scrunching up from the table, I said, "I'm sorry about Joe, real sorry, Miss Benson."

VIII

The Long-Malamed was still

crowded. Ruth Benson went directly to the back room. Irene Whitney made a face at me, but there was something extra-special in the face. Could be my excursion with Ruth Benson was going to do me more good with Irene than with the murderer of Joe Malamed.

I pushed through to Tobias. I said, "Where's Morse?"

"Got a seat inside."

"Mrs. Malamed?"

"Still downtown."

"Melvin?"

"Here I am," Melvin said, touching my shoulder.

"Can we go upstairs, you and I, where we can talk?"

"Sure."

"Just a minute." I leaned over to Tobias. "When you get a chance, and you get a free waiter, tell Morse I'm upstairs with Melvin, to come up and join us."

"Okay, Mr. Chambers."

Melvin took me upstairs to the room that had been Joe Malamed's. It was an all-male room, with a fireplace, and heavy oak furniture.

"Melvin," I said. "Why didn't you tell me there was trouble between you and Joe Malamed?"

"It wouldn't have helped. In finding your murderer."

"Wouldn't it? And why didn't you tell me about Ruth Benson?"

"Now, look, Mr. Chambers —"

"Why didn't you tell me, Melvin? You hired me. You must have figured me for a pretty smart guy. You must have figured I'd find out.

Why didn't you tell me, Melvin?"

"Because it was none of your business, that's why."

"Wasn't it?"

"If I thought it would be of any help, I'd have told you. I don't believe in washing dirty linen in public." His face got creased up and his fidgety fingers came out shaking. "Look, Mr. Chambers, I didn't kill Joe Malamed."

From the doorway, Charles Morse said: "They want you downstairs, Mr. Long."

Melvin's hands dropped to his sides, and he looked toward me. "Is it all right?"

"Sure, Melvin."

His head swivelled from me to Morse to me, and then he turned and walked out quickly.

Morse dropped into an easy chair near the door. "I heard, Mr. Chambers."

"Heard what?"

"His denial. Didn't you accuse him of murder?"

"Nope," I said. "I'm accusing you."

"I beg your pardon."

"I'm accusing you. Of the murder of Joe Malamed."

He squinted at me a moment, and smiled. He had his ivory holder out. He dropped it back in his pocket and stood up.

"Is this some new method of questioning?"

"Nope. It's a statement of fact."

"I murdered Joe Malamed?"

"That's right."

"You'd better tell me what's on your mind, Chambers," he said, quietly.

I wondered whether he was wearing a gun, but it was too late now for wonder. "One group," I said, "at one table, could have killed Joe Malamed. Someone of that group. You know that?"

"Very well. I also know that unless you can prove beyond a reasonable doubt *which* one at that table did so, legally, there's no case."

"I'll proceed to do so."

"You have my rapt attention, Mr. Chambers."

I moved close, close enough in case of action. "At the table, we have Ruth Benson, Frankie Hines, Melvin Long, Claire Malamed, and you."

"So far, so good."

"We'll first eliminate Ruth Benson."

"Why?"

"Because she was wholly, completely and irrevocably in love with Joe Malamed. She'd have rather killed herself than him. Agreed?"

"I'll take your word for it."

"We'll eliminate, next, Frankie Hines."

"Why?"

"Because he's dead, killed by the same one that killed Malamed."

"I can't accept that, or — shall we say — I accept it with reservations."

"Next we eliminate Melvin Long. Because he has a phobia about guns. His statements to that effect have

been positively corroborated by one whose paramount interest is the death of the killer. Whom does that leave, Mr. Morse?"

The smile was still there.

"According to you — Claire Malamed and myself."

"Very good, Mr. Morse. You have an orderly mind."

Then I made my first move to obliterate his smile. I dipped into my pocket and brought up the gold medal I had rescued from Claire Malamed's treasure chest. It worked. The smile went away and never came back. A vein in his temple began to dance.

I held up the gold medal. It glinted in the light.

"The police," I said, "have been busy working on routine. Sooner or later, it will come to them. Whoever killed Joe Malamed had to be an expert marksman. One shot, remember, from the inner room. One little bullet, and wham — Joe Malamed was dead, a bullet through his temple. So . . . our quarry is an expert marksman."

"What do you have in your hand?"

"A medal for marksmanship. Target Club Competition. Awarded to C. M. This was found in Claire Malamed's jewel box."

He was beginning to squirm. "Even if true, that would involve Claire Malamed, not me."

"Uh uh," I said. "Claire Malamed knows nothing about guns. She tried to pop me with an automatic, and

didn't even know enough to spring the safety catch. Your initials are C. M., Mr. Morse. You won this medal. It won't take much investigation to prove that. You're our marksman, pal. There isn't another one at that table that could shoot a gun that expertly. The cops will come to it soon enough, and then you're it, Mr. Morse, you're double it."

"And so far this has been your own, solitary venture?"

"So far, but not for long."

"Thanks," he said. He flipped open his jacket. He wore a belt holster. A large forty-five, competently held, looked at me. I looked back at it. "It's pleasant to know," he said, "that no one else, so far, has come to these conclusions. Perhaps no one else will, without prompting from you. And I'll do what I can, within reason of course, to prevent you from prompting."

"Easy, pal," I said. "Would you like me to go on, or would you like to finish off the prompter, promptly? I'd suggest you wait for Calvin and his drums. He does pretty good to screen off the sound of a shot."

"Sure," he said pleasantly. "Go ahead. I'm not really worried about screening shots this time. We had a talk and split up, and I doubled back and found you sneaking around here, and you got tough, and I used a gun for which I have a perfectly valid license. Mrs. Malamed will verify the fact that you've sneaked around before."

"Who's going to make the speeches, pal — you or me?"

"You. For the nonce."

"Okay. The medal. Rather valuable. You gave it to Mrs. Malamed."

"Why?"

"Token of affection. Like a fraternity pin, or Air Force wings. You two are — how do they say it? — thataway."

"How do you know that?"

"We'll come to it. Let's finish one murder first. With Malamed dead, Mrs. Malamed inherits plenty, and she cashes a two hundred thousand dollar policy. Pretty good?"

"Good, indeed."

"So you plan it carefully. Gloves and stuff. Darkness, wild lights, Calvin Cole's drums. You're even smart enough to plant the gun in your own coat pocket, just in case any latent fingerprints can be developed."

"Pretty smart yourself."

"It began to come clear to me," I said, "when Frankie Hines told me he had a hunch about the killer. But he wouldn't talk. Want to know why?"

"I'm dying to know why."

"He said he had an investment to protect. Investment. Fifteen thousand dollars that Joe owed him. Now, who would he go to for the protection of this investment? Who, Mr. Morse?"

Silence. Silence, and a black gun, and pale steady eyes.

"One person," I said. "Only one. Claire Malamed. Who else? Then he said he was going to make one last

pitch for it tonight. And he added, quote: 'If I don't get it — stand by for a load of information.' " I rubbed the flat of my palm across my mouth. "What kind of information that he could use as a crowbar to pry loose fifteen G's? Stack that up against a heavy gold medal that little Claire treasures in her jewel box. C. M. Claire Malamed. Also, Charles Morse. It figured. He was a nosey little guy. He knew about Claire's extra-marital romance. He knew about Claire and you. So he came to her. He said for her to pay up — and he'd shut up."

"Blackmail." Charles Morse made his first impulsive, involuntary statement of the night. "If she paid him once — it would never end."

"Of course. So you followed him back to his eatery, and you let him have it. Probably out of the same forty-five you're holding now. You're supposed to get rid of that, Mr. Morse."

"Right now," he said, "it's safest with me. There are numbers and things to be filed off before disposing of it. Please remember, this was an emergency usage."

I grinned, suddenly, and I thumbed my nose. "Got you, pal."

"Got me?"

"Sure. You can't use the gun you're holding no matter how much you want to. It'd tie you right up to Frankie's murder. Work your way out of that one, book critic."

I had thrown him a curve and it confused him. He wavered. For just

one instant. I had inched my way near enough to take advantage of that one instant. After all, I'm in the business. I hit his gun hand with my left and I hit his jaw with my right. The left worked. The gun splattered to the floor. The right left him gaping, but he was still on his feet. I waved the left again, big in his face, and as he ducked, the right caught him, good this time, flush on the mouth. He went down, spluttering blood. I reached for the gun — and looked up to Mrs. Claire Malamed, mink coat and all, in the doorway.

"What . . . ?" she said.

"Downstairs, lady. You and your beautiful boy friend."

He got up, quivering. The blood was leaking down his chin. He fluttered a hand for a handkerchief.

"Nope," I said. "No toiletries. Downstairs, the two of you."

The Long-Malamed's cocktail lounge buzzed when I herded them down the white marble stairs in front of Charles Morse's ugly black forty-five.

IX

Ernie Schmatola's was seething with people. I was seated thigh-close to Irene Whitney and many teacups had come and gone at our table. Suddenly, she turned and kissed me square on the lips. A long, lingering kiss.

"The hell with Yale," she said, "You win. Three cheers for you."

Louis Parker, across the table,

cleared his throat.

"Getting back to this pistol."

"Gimme," I said. "I'm dying to see what's so tough to trace."

Louis handed the gleaming nickel-plated pearl-handled thirty-eight revolver to me. He said, "Every possible mark of identification has been filed off. *You* trace it."

"I'm certain I can give you the name and address of the gun's owner within a half hour," I said.

"Bet?"

"Yes. A dinner at the Chambord for Irene — Miss Whitney — and myself, against my contribution of one thousand dollars to the P.A.L."

"Done," Parker said.

At this precise moment, Melvin Long came roaring down Schmatola's aisle, riotously gay or riotously drunk.

"Mr. Chambers," he called.

He stood over us, his grin so wide it lifted his ears. "I found it! Stuck away in the bureau drawer beneath my shirts."

"Found what, Mel?" I asked.

"This." He fumbled in his coat pocket and laid a twin to the nickel-plated job beside the other. There was silence for a long moment.

"And don't worry, Mr. Chambers. Don't worry about the fee. You certainly earned it."

"The fee," I said, "I've just lost, Mel."

No fee. But could I kick? I felt the pressure of Irene's thigh again, and I decided, why hell, no, I couldn't kick.



MUGGED AND PRINTED

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

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

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



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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



SHOWDOWN

"I'm Vetter! Me . . . Vetter. The one everyone wonders about, even the cops. Vetter the puzzle. Vetter the one who's there but isn't there. Remember the note, Renzo. You're big and strong . . . you're a killer!" Renzo tried to scream, stumpled and fell. He was reaching for something in the desk drawer knowing all the time he wasn't going to make it . . . Here's Vetter in the final payoff installment of Mickey Spillane's *Everybody's Watching Me*. Twenty-five thrill-packed pages that wind up the serial and set the pace for this big, big April issue.

SLAUGHTER

Robert Patrick Wilmot is here with a powerful yarn titled *The G-Notes*, an ironic, fast-paced story of money and murder. And there's a Richard Ellington yarn titled *Fan Club*, featuring his well-known private eye, Steve Drake, up to his ears in a Carribean crime crusade.

SUSPENSE

For pure adventure, strongly seasoned with homicide, David Goodis' *The Blue Sweetheart* mixes sapphires, blondes, and revenge with a Ceylon background. And Robert Turner is represented with an edge-of-the-seat tale titled *Be My Guest*, about a punch-drunk boxer and a sex-starved killer.

SHOCK

Don't miss *Mugger Murder* by Richard Deming and *Kid Kill* by Evan Hunter, both of which are the most unusual stories *Manhunt* has ever run. And the comments on each will make you sit up and start thinking hard.

SPICE

And for devil-may-care fun, and high-spirited detection, there's *One Little Bullet* by Henry Kane, a hell-raising fiction feast featuring Peter Chambers, the Manhattan private richard with a flair for trouble. There's more too — and it all adds up to a pleasure-loaded issue for April!