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The Caller

It was horrible. The voice kept spouting filth, telling her things about herself that no one else could possibly know . . .

THE telephone rang and Miss Turner awoke with a start. From the next room she could hear the outraged whimpering of her mother, a chronic invalid and a light sleeper. It was precisely 2:30 A.M.

The bell didn't stop ringing and Miss Turner got herself focussed. She snatched up her frayed chambray robe, flipped on the hallway switch enroute, and hurried, splayfooted, down the stairs. Her hand shook on the receiver.

"Is this Phoebe?" It was a man's voice, low and peculiar.

"Why, yes. Yes. What is it?"

There was a slight pause, then, in an amused manner, the voice declared: "You're a piece of what goes floating down the river." The voice didn't leave anything to doubt. It gave the four-letter synonym.

Miss Turner stiffened. "What? What did you say?"

"I said you're a piece of — nothing.



BY
EMMANUEL WINTERS

How can you call yourself a human being? Why don't you go drown yourself in a sewer?" The voice became sly, horrible. "How about it? Would you like me to come over and visit with you a while? You know. Real cozy?"

Miss Turner was slight, around forty, with pinched cheeks, and eyes chronically tired from working all her life in an insurance office. Completely shoaled by duties and unalluring, someone to feel sorry for. Certainly not anyone who'd receive this type of call.

Now she was fully awake and began to shriek, but she thought in time to lower her voice and avoid alarming her mother. "Who are you? What *is* this? Are you crazy or something?"

"Me?" the voice purred.

"Yes, you."

"Oh, no, *I'm* not crazy or something." The voice was illiterate, untrained, with a bit of a cigarette rasp around the edges, but well handled. Absolutely controlled, purposeful.

Miss Turner trembled, but suddenly felt tremendous relief as a new thought came to her. She could almost laugh. "You obviously have the wrong number."

"Wrong number?" The voice went on purring. "This is Bedford 3-5573, isn't it?"

A film came over Miss Turner's eyes. She couldn't speak.

"Well, is it or is it not?"

"It is."

"And you're this gorgeous little

babe named Phoebe, ain't you?"

Panic peered in at all the windows and its sneer rustled the string-drapes between the parlor and dining room. Miss Turner went hot and cold with perspiration, and could barely hold the receiver.

"What do you want with me?"

The snicker came over unmistakably. "Who, me? Why, nothing. Nothing at all. Except what would *anybody* want from the sexiest broad we got in town?"

Miss Turner prepared to slam down the receiver. "Why, you lunatic. How dare you? I'm going to hang up and if you ever have the audacity to call this number again, I'll call the police."

"Well, well, how cozy," the voice said. "You going to let them in on it too? And the fire department? And the U.S. Marines?"

Miss Turner flushed and brought the receiver down, but not before the last raucous statement had come through to her ears. "You're going to hear from me often. Day and night. Mostly nights."

On the way up, Miss Turner felt dizzy. She decided she'd better not tell her mother. Her mother had a bad heart. "Some nut with a wrong number," she called out in answer to the querulous inquiry from the other room. But at breakfast it almost came out. They were having orange juice and oatmeal in the alcove off the hallway when the phone rang. It was 7:30. Miss

Turner jumped, then tried to take hold of herself. She went to the phone casually but at once gripped the receiver so hard her knuckles showed white. It was the voice again.

"Look you, whoever you are," she whispered fiercely. "My mother is a very sick woman and can't stand very much more of this sort of thing, I can tell you. If you don't hang up this minute and stop bothering us I'll go to the police." Her voice became a bit hysterical. "Hang up," she said.

"What a shame," the man said. "Sick? Your mother?"

"Yes. Extremely."

There was a pause, then a chuckle, deep in the throat and outrageous. "Then you and me'll have to be real careful we don't disturb her when I come calling. We'll just use the downstairs couch." The voice went down to a sexy whisper. "Ready for me yet, sweetheart — huh?"

Miss Turner slipped the receiver down without a sound and immediately raised her voice. "I'm sorry, madam. You've got the wrong number. This is Bedford 3-5573, *not* four. Please do be careful in the future." She forced a smile and went back to the alcove and her mother.

Her mother was a wasted away woman with slipshod white hair and a deep pallor, chronically weary. She had been a vivacious woman at one time, with a good sense of humor — totally opposite from the traditional possessive mother. But after a lifetime of sickness, early widowhood,

and total dependence on her daughter, her kindly humor had turned into a kind of bitterness. Complaint often crept into her voice. "Another wrong number, Marie? Who is it, a secret boy friend?" Her voice changed. "Couldn't sleep a wink after the phone ringing last night."

The teacup was shaking in Miss Turner's hand. "If this goes on I just don't know what we're going to do, mama."

However much you want to keep a thing like this secret from someone who shares your home, Miss Turner saw clearly, it soon becomes impossible. If the calls were going to persist her mother would finally have to know, and Miss Turner was afraid of what it would do to her heart.

That night exactly at midnight the third call came and Miss Turner again had to rush down from bed. This time she hung up right away. When he called back immediately she left the receiver off the hook. But half an hour later — just time enough for her to have crept back into bed and gotten to sleep — the phone company sent its attention-getter alarm through, and kept blasting insistently until her mother cried out, "For heaven's sake, Marie. Answer the phone." When the voice called shortly after, he threatened to ring all night, if necessary, and Miss Turner had to talk to him for at least five minutes. The abuse was worse with more outrageous invitations and four-letter descriptions.

"For God's sake," Miss Turner said, almost in tears. "What do you have against me? Who are you? Why are you doing this to us? Wont you *please* stop calling?"

The man laughed again, the strange, suggestive laugh. "Call you in the morning, baby. Early. Maybe I'll catch you with your pants off."

The first thing that morning Miss Turner decided. She'd better tell her mother. These calls were going to continue. And at breakfast she did. "In case *you* were to answer the telephone sometime, mama."

To Miss Turner's surprise, Mrs. Turner was neither amazed nor upset, just rather amused. And, staring, Miss Turner said: "Thank God, at least, mama, for that."

Her mother said that, why, yes she'd heard of such cases, cranks getting hold of someone's telephone number and making a nuisance of themselves for spite, an imagined grievance, or something. Had her daughter insulted or slighted someone down at the office?

"Why, no," Miss Turner said. That's what she'd been wracking her brains over. She didn't have an enemy in the world.

"Well," her mother suggested, "there's only one thing to do. Take the matter up with the telephone company immediately. Have them trace the call."

"Yes," Miss Turner said. That's what she'd been thinking herself.

The following Wednesday, her afternoon off, she went downtown to

the local company offices and was referred at once to the supervisor, a Mrs. Armstrong. Mrs. Armstrong was a courteous, smart looking woman who heard her out alertly and showed sincere dismay but said that unfortunately not much could be done. There were too many similar cases and they couldn't track down local calls unless of the utmost emergency. The only thing she could suggest would be to install a new, unlisted number. But Miss Turner made a sad sound. "Oh, I do outside stenographic work, Mrs. Armstrong. I'm listed in all the agencies. People wouldn't know where to call." Mrs. Armstrong was sympathetic. In that case, Miss Turner would simply have to bear it out until the caller, undoubtedly one of those psychopathic cases, got tired, or picked up the trail of someone else. If it got too troublesome — disturbing a sick mother certainly was a bad thing — Miss Turner might take the matter up with the police. Perhaps they could work something out. It certainly would be worth trying.

"Well, maybe he'll stop himself." Miss Turner managed to smile. "If only we could get a clue as to who he is." When she walked down the long corridor on her way out she saw Mrs. Armstrong making a moue of puzzlement. It was obvious to Miss Turner that Mrs. Armstrong was wondering who would call on such a precious anonymous little thing like her. Telephone cranks and poison pen writers usually knew what their

victims looked like, wanted somebody glamorous.

That, apparently, was the question puzzling not only Mrs. Armstrong. That evening as Miss Turner and her mother sat together reading magazines in the little parlor still furnished with antimacassars and rockers from Mrs. Turner's youth — both really quite openly waiting for the telephone to ring — Miss Turner saw that her mother was wondering about it, too. Miss Turner knew exactly what was going on in her mother's head, had for years. In her own heyday, Mrs. Turner had been a pretty, gay young woman with a great many male admirers. And she'd never stopped thinking her daughter should have inherited some of it. Miss Turner watched the older woman peer over the top of the magazine with a strange sour antagonism. Maybe, Miss Turner was beginning to realize, her mother had a point. Those droopy old dresses! She hadn't had a new hat in three years! Even to herself she had to admit that she was hopeless, an old maid. The past 20 years all she'd done for excitement was go to church suppers, take in a movie once a week, and, for her annual two-week vacation, visit with her mother at a quiet lake hotel nearby, rocking on the porch with the old ladies.

But Mrs. Armstrong's and Mrs. Turner's puzzlement didn't alter the fact. Some man *was* calling Miss Turner.

That midnight he called again,

and all the rest of the week, and they didn't have the courage to call the police. For both of them it would be a terrible strain. He now let loose with such a new low in sexuality, when Mrs. Turner heard what he'd said (she insisted her daughter tell it all, word for word) she had palpitations and couldn't sleep and Miss Turner herself on two occasions was violently sick to her stomach.

"Well, what are we going to do?" her mother asked at breakfast the end of that week. The night had been horrible.

Miss Turner clasped her hands. She was the picture of helplessness and total disorganization. She looked terrible. "I don't know. I've done everything. I've appealed to his better nature, threatened to call the police, told him how ill you were. Nothing works. Frankly, mother, I'm at my rope's end. I suppose now we'll simply have to go to the police and get it over with."

Mrs. Turner was painfully upset. "Oh, the police," she said. "And the publicity." She looked as though she were going to have an attack, and Miss Turner agreed with her attitude. Like her mother, she herself, she said, could take a few more days of it — all that abuse and the broken nights — if in the end it meant he'd get tired and stop by himself. "But I warn you, mama," she said, shaking her head wearily, "if one more week doesn't do it, then it's straight to the police. I don't think I can stand more."

"Well, maybe the man *will* stop." Her mother smiled with queer hopefulness.

The man didn't stop. All the rest of the week everything was the same — horrible calls at all hours. There was only one change, Miss Turner reported.

Miss Turner told her mother it was something brand-new and was frightening her to death. It was no longer a matter of mere annoyance, nuisance, curiosity, or lost sleep. This was nightmare. The man had begun telling her things out of her past.

"Things out of your past?"

"Yes."

"Such as what?"

Miss Turner got a funny look. "Well, such as: 'What about Lemuel G.?' " Lemuel Greer had been one of Miss Turner's classmates, and had been considered the handsomest boy in school, star of the football and basketball teams, head of the dramatic club, a dream of a dancer; all the girls had been wild about him. He'd been elected class "dreamboat."

"Why, what about Lemuel Greer?" her mother demanded.

Miss Turner got flustered and didn't want to talk about it but finally had to confess. At the class picnic, she and Lemuel had gone for a stroll in the wood, found a deserted bandstand, and sat talking for hours.

"He went with *you*?" her mother said.

"Yes, mama. Oh, all perfectly in-

nocent, of course." Lemuel had merely kissed her once, that was all. It was one of her fondest memories. She'd kept it secret even from her mother.

Mrs. Turner said, "Why, Lemuel Greer married Susan Ann Blower not three months out of high school." They were schoolmate sweethearts.

Miss Turner nodded. "Yes." What frightened her was that nobody in the world but she and Lemuel — who, for the past 20 years, had been an oil executive in Arabia — knew anything about the bandstand business. "How did the lunatic on the telephone know?"

Also, how did he know to mention the time, just two or three months ago, some horrible man, sitting next to her in the balcony of the movie house, had let his arm slip from the back of her chair to around her waist and begged her to see the picture over again with him — until she'd threatened to call the management?

"What?" her mother said hoarsely.

There were five or six other little matters the man had brought up out of the depths of her past. "Oh, God, mama," Miss Turner begged, "I'm going crazy. How can he possibly know?"

Her mother stared for a long moment. "Well, all right," she said finally, resolutely. "It's gone far enough. I don't believe I can stand another night's broken sleep, anyway. We've tried to dissuade him two whole weeks and it hasn't worked. Now we'll go to the police."

That evening, on her way home from work, Miss Turner dropped in at headquarters and asked to see the chief. Chief Harrington was a tall skinny cigar-chewer with a bald head, a chronic worried look, and a kindly soft voice which he tried to make charming. He told her to sit down and listened carefully to her story.

The chief got an amused little twinkle in his eyes; it was perfectly normal — he couldn't hide it. "Phoning *you*, Miss Turner?"

"Yes."

"Saying those things right out?"

"Yes. Seems to get an awful sadistic pleasure out of it."

The chief got down to business. He shook his head. "I don't know what makes them tick. Nuts. We get them in spells, like clockwork." He said there was only one way to go about it. If she could manage to wangle a date out of him and have him call for her at a certain spot, lonely or otherwise, his men could be waiting in plainclothes to pick up the nut. He leaned forward. "Do you think you could arrange it?"

"Well, he's been asking for a date every time he's called," Miss Turner said.

"Think he really means it?"

"Of course he really means it." Miss Turner appeared a trifle piqued.

The chief sat back. "Well, fine." He put his palms together and thought a moment. "When he calls tonight make believe you're falling for his stuff. Act a little flirtatious.

When he asks for a date, tell him you've been thinking it over and maybe he's not as bad as he sounds. You'll meet him, let's see, tomorrow night or any other night — let him set the night — and make it somewhere innocent where it won't arouse his suspicion: Say at the last table in the Main Street Cafeteria. Our boys will be sitting around." The chief was efficient and considerate; it was a fetish with him. "Don't worry, Miss Turner. Our boys will see that nothing happens to *you*." He grinned with conscious charm. "It'll be as safe as a jaunt to Sunday School."

Miss Turner got up and put on her gloves. She was sparkling. "Worry, Chief Harrington? Why, I've never felt better. This is an adventure." She was flushing with pleasure, actually flirtatious. "What makes you think I go to Sunday School?"

The chief escorted her past the sergeant's desk and when she went on alone she could distinctly hear behind her in the hollow city-hall corridor the murmur of their voices, climaxed by the sergeant's surprised: "Her, chief?" It was genuine. Miss Turner was quite flattered. The tone was one of respect, even admiration.

The next few nights, Miss Turner put on, she thought, the act of her life. During her conversations with the man, her indignation transitioned subtly to charm and girlishness, and the man's sly suggestive sexualities were answered more and more in

measure. "Well, well," the man said. "So I busted you down." His voice was almost affectionate. "You won't be sorry, baby. What night would you like to be lucky?"

Miss Turner thought the following evening would be a good time but the man said No, he wanted to rest up a few nights to be sure this would be the date of her life, something sometime she'd want to write a book about. "How about next Saturday night?"

"Where?" Miss Turner asked.

"How about in front of the bus station?"

"No," Miss Turner said. That wouldn't suit her. Too conspicuous. Somebody might spot her — one of her many boy friends.

"Well, where then?"

"How about inside the Main Street Cafeteria — my usual place, the last table from the entrance?" She'd be wearing a new pink hat with a veil — and a pink carnation over her heart.

"Heart?" He said the other word, a shorter one, and then gave her the wind-off laugh. Miss Turner, hanging up, clapped her hands. Everything had gone off just as the police chief had wished.

The following day she called on him at headquarters and told what had happened, and the chief wanted to know had the man seemed suspicious and Miss Turner said the man certainly hadn't *acted* suspicious. Within the next few days came corroboration. The phone calls abruptly

ceased. Apparently no need to call any more, mission accomplished. Chief Harrington pointed out, however, that it might also indicate the man had got wind of something and had decided to ditch the whole thing. But in that event, nothing lost. Miss Turner would be free of the nuisance which was, after all, the main idea.

"Most certainly is," Miss Turner agreed heartily. Miss Turner didn't know why; every time she spoke with the chief she felt like a woman of the world, calm and sophisticated. It was like coming out of her cocoon.

The chief made all the arrangements. Miss Turner would merely have to show up in the cafeteria at the proper time Saturday night. He would assign four detectives to the four adjacent tables and, to make doubly sure, he'd station men at both the front and rear exits.

The only question was, would the man show up?

"If he does," the chief instructed her, "the crackpot will probably not make himself known until he's convinced himself from a distance, probably through the front window or at another table as an innocent diner, that everything is okay. That means he'll probably be later than you've arranged. If and when he does finally get up enough courage to come over to your table, you just greet him cordially, let him sit down — and that's all we'll need. We'll close in fast. It'll be over in a minute."

"What'll I do then?" Miss Turner inquired, timidly. Miss Turner was

wearing her brand-new hat, the pink job, and was so excited she could hardly sit still. For the past two weeks she'd been living at the outside limits of her endurance.

"Do? Why, get up and walk away. Fast. Go straight out the door and on home."

"That's all you'll need me?"

"That's all we'll need you. The man'll convict himself." The chief grinned amiably. "You're our finger girl, Miss Turner. In that new hat, you look real nice."

How Miss Turner got through the next few days to Saturday she didn't know. She couldn't concentrate on her actuarial tables at the office, and at home she had sieges of dropping cups and breaking out into hot and cold perspiration.

Her mother was annoyed. "What are you going around like an idiot for?"

Miss Turner said, "I don't know, mama."

"You don't know? Well, what bothers you?"

Miss Turner said she knew it was stupid — a really old maid idea — but she decided to tell it anyway. "Suppose Saturday night this maniac gets a good look at me, remembers what I look like, and later on recognizes me?"

"Recognizes you?"

"Yes. And after he's served his sentence, suppose he comes back for revenge?"

"Huh," Mrs. Turner said. "What

a fool you are. You're not only unattractive, Marie, but you also have as little sense as a rabbit. In the first place, he wouldn't dare, what with the police on to him, and in the second place, we'll see that he *doesn't* recognize you."

"How?" Miss Turner wanted to know.

"We'll just make that hat veil of yours so thick he can't see through."

That was what she herself had had in the back of her head for days now, Miss Turner confessed, but she had been afraid it might make her look too got-up. Saturday evening after a final briefing over the phone by the chief, she groomed herself carefully and went downtown so heavily veiled several people turned around to look. A few of her acquaintances passed and didn't recognize her. In the veil, new hat and pink carnation pinned to her breast Miss Turner felt fairly safe.

She entered the cafeteria, got herself a cup of coffee on a tray and proceeded to the last table, which usually was empty because so many people passed by. The place was well filled. If she hadn't known, she would never have recognized the four occupants of the adjoining tables as detectives. They were eating supper off a tray and didn't glance at her once; and, after a while, she realized she'd been staring and decided she'd better stop it. Instead she played with the spoon and coffee. It was just 6:30, the hour set for the date. She stopped stirring.

Miss Turner shivered. If the man came in, how would he act? Would he be violent, would he put up a fight? Would they have to hit him, or handcuff him?

In the next fifteen minutes a lot of people walked in and out, many passing her table, but nobody stopped, looked interested, or looked remotely like a lunatic.

Miss Turner began to feel terribly nervous. Suppose he didn't show up, suppose the chief was right and he was really suspicious — that moment was peering through the window getting an idea, even with the veil, of what she looked like, and followed her home and in some dark, terrible place, out of a bush, say, would come leaping like a wild animal? Inside the veiling, Miss Turner's face became a running hotness, and in that moment it happened: unmistakably a man was approaching. He was coming straight down the aisle from the front entrance, heading toward her table. Maybe he'd go by, maybe he wouldn't. Miss Turner fell into a panic. He was short and squat, in a rough tweed overcoat, with a battered brown hat over his face and looked like anybody else middle-aged; you wouldn't look at him twice in a shooting gallery.

Miss Turner's heart pounded; she couldn't help edging backward in her chair. But she noticed with relief out of one corner of her eye that while the four detectives were still draped over their tables as be-

fore, their legs had come out from under the chairs and tables, ready to go.

Maybe, after all, the man would go on past.

"Oh, God," Miss Turner said audibly inside her veil. He wasn't going to pass. He came up to the table and lifted his hat. His face was pasty, and jowly, he had twinkly egg-blue eyes, and the head was balder than Chief Harrington's — with a fringe of dirty-brown grey hair. "You Phoebe?" The voice was unmistakable — the same coarse, laughing, illiterate quality — only now it was, to her surprise, quite embarrassed, even breathless.

Miss Turner's voice was at least five notes higher than usual. She didn't recognize it. "Yes. How do you do? Won't you sit down?"

"Pleasure." The man pulled out a chair and sat down. He was smiling politely, trying to penetrate the veil. After a moment, his assurance returned. "Whenever you want, you can take off the coverin', baby. I'd like to see what you look like."

Miss Turner thought it was the highlight of the whole affair. She was able to titter. "Sure. Why not? Be right back from the lady's room." And off she hopped. In that moment, without hurry or excitement, the four detectives simultaneously were up and around the man.

"What's this?" the man said, grinning. He didn't offer the least resistance. But there was no answer. The detectives hustled him over to

the plain black police car outside, and most of the diners didn't notice a thing, didn't even know an arrest was taking place. There was nothing to show for it, just a group of ordinary looking men walking out, peculiarly huddled, almost in step.

This was the man, all right. It was a splendid, even brilliant catch. But he was a complete fraud. An hour later that evening Chief Harrington phoned Miss Turner to tell her the news. He was a man named Pete Jones, a night watchman at a downtown office building — hence the night calls, except Saturday, his night off. He was a churchman, married, with three kids, had never been in trouble before, and was perfectly willing, in fact quite eager, to admit he was the one who'd been calling her. The only thing, Chief Harrington said, Jones claimed the whole thing had been a joke.

"A joke?" Miss Turner said, stunned.

"Yes. He says he was doing somebody a favor."

"A favor?"

"That's right."

Miss Turner felt sudden panic. "You mean there's still another lunatic at large who was in on it?"

The Chief smiled. "Don't get flustered, Miss Turner. Not quite. He claims somebody asked him to do it as a joke on you. Says it was one of your friends or associates. Says they gave him your telephone number, told him you were hot

stuff, and said he should go ahead and give you the works, pull no punches over the telephone."

Miss Turner was incredulous. "But why?"

"So they could tease you about it afterward. All they told him was to ask for Phoebe. Says he doesn't have the slightest idea who he's been talking to."

"Who's this 'friend or associate'?" Miss Turner didn't try to hide her skepticism.

"He won't say."

"He won't?"

"No."

"Well, why not make him?"

"I tried," the Chief said. "He won't talk. On that score says nobody can make him talk. He doesn't want to get anybody in dutch."

Miss Turner thought it over and laughed. "Well, that's the best I've heard yet. I don't believe a word of it. It's ridiculous. He wasn't just spoofing. Not the way he talked over the phone. What about the way he demanded a date? What about the date he fixed for tonight?"

The Chief laughed helplessly. "Well," he said, "since this particular party told him you were so gorgeous, and terrific, a raving beauty, and *willing*, it would appear, he thought while he was about it he'd just go ahead on his own and see how far he could get. That was his own idea. He admits it. It wasn't part of the agreement."

"Well, so far as I'm concerned," Miss Turner said bitterly, "that's

enough for prosecution. But I suppose the way all of you are taking it, as a joke, that ends the case right there."

The Chief became businesslike again. "No," he said. Miss Turner could tell he was swiveling the cigar around in his mouth. "We've decided, even if his story is true, we're going to teach him a lesson he won't forget. We're going to ask for a stiff thirty day sentence plus a fine. You come down here quick as you can for the hearing."

"Me?"

"In view of his claiming it was a joke, we'll need you, after all, to swear out the warrant and identify him, to put the thing on ice."

"I thought my helping to trap him in the cafeteria was enough."

"Well, I've told you; it isn't." The Chief sounded as though he were getting a little tired, or anxious to get this silly business over with so he could go home. The hour was late.

"Oh, I wish you didn't need me," Miss Turner said.

"Why not?"

"I feel terribly flustered; I'm scared to death."

"Why?"

"When that awful man gets to know what I look like he'll come back after his thirty days and try to do me or my mother some harm."

She sounded just like someone looking under the bed, and this time the chief really laughed. "Take my word for it, Miss Turner. I can

appreciate your concern, but this man is just a dope, perfectly harmless. He's sitting in there blubbering like a baby right now. He's so ashamed he wants to go find a hole and get lost. He'll eat right out of your hand."

"Oh, please, don't ask me," Miss Turner persisted.

"Now, look," the Chief said. He was getting really annoyed. There was no mistaking the authority.

"Well, all right," Miss Turner said. "I still can't believe it, not the way he talked, but I'll be right down. If I must I must. How long will it take? Will I be able to just pop in and out?"

"Of course," the Chief said. "Not more than a minute or two. All you have to do is say he's the man. You won't even have to take off your hat and coat."

Thirty minutes later Miss Turner got off the bus and went inside the stone building and the sergeant directed her to the entrance where the police magistrate for that month was presiding over night court.

The magistrate was up on the bench looking over the police report. Off to one side, in the press box, the Chief was chewing on his cigar and watching a cluster of night-duty boys matching pennies. The man, Pete Jones, was seated directly in front of the desk, shaking his head as though he couldn't believe it. He was red-eyed, and so completely crushed that Miss Turner had to

look twice. She remembered with amazement the self-possessed calmness of his voice on the telephone.

She walked in and went over to the chief, who smiled at her graciously and things began to get started. Jones was told to come up and be identified. He came forward with his head still down and stood that way, like a dozing mule, but when Miss Turner was called up beside him, Jones snapped his head around and couldn't take his eyes off her. He seemed to be fascinated. She was wearing the same veiled hat and pink carnation.

"All right," the magistrate said. He took a look. "Miss Turner, suppose you take off that lovely veil and let us get started. Once you've identified him it won't take more than two, three minutes. The man has admitted everything."

Miss Turner looked to the chief at her elbow. "Must I, Chief Harrington?"

The chief smiled reassuringly. "Must you what?"

"Take off my veil? You said I could just pop in and out."

The chief laughed pleasantly. "Sure. Accused must be confronted face to face. That's the law. You still afraid of him?"

"Yes."

The chief turned to the prisoner grimly. "Well, you don't have to be. We'll straighten this out right now. If this man ever molests you in any way, shape, or form again, we'll give him the works. A three

year rap. Did you hear that, Jones?"

"Yessir, I heard you," Jones mumbled. He still couldn't take his eyes off Miss Turner. He was like a man in a trance. It was clear he didn't have a shred of courage left, just a kind of hypnosis.

"Well, all right," the magistrate said. He was getting impatient. "Miss Turner take the stand, remove your veil, and let's go."

Miss Turner went up to the stand, turned around, lifted both hands to the veil and tossed it back over her hat. Regardless what the chief had said, she was still scared to death. But there was nothing else to do. She was smiling like a ninny. It was a kind of trap. She'd never dreamed it would go this far.

"Okay," the magistrate said. "That's better. Now we'll move fast. Is that the man who called you on the telephone, told you obscenities, and in pursuance of an indecent proposal came up to you in the restaurant?"

There was no answer and after a split second all the reporters' heads snapped up to look. Miss Turner was staring at the prisoner. Jones had turned red, then absolutely dead white, then he laughed one quick abrupt laugh and finally took a stumbling step forward.

"Are you the lady I been talking to on the telephone?" It didn't have the slightest braggadocio. It was simply a pleading question.

Miss Turner tried, but couldn't answer. Only her mouth opened.

"She sure is," Chief Harrington said.

"My God." Jones turned his head to look at everybody in a dull stupid way. It was hard to tell if he was beginning to grin or beginning to cry.

The chief looked at him sharply. "What's the matter with you, Lothario? Now you see her, you disappointed, you dumbfounded?"

Jones' lips were quivering, opening and closing soundlessly as though he were full of some horrible thing.

"Oh, my God," he kept saying. Everybody looked at everybody else.

"Say, what's the matter with you?" the chief demanded.

"This woman," Jones said. You could barely hear him.

"What about this woman?"

"She's the one asked me to do it."

"What!" the chief said, sharply.

"She's the one asked me, I tell you. I wouldn't of told on her before if it cost me my life. I know her well. She's Miss Marie Turner from the big insurance office up on the 14th floor. I've known her twenty years. Always give me a kind word and a fine expensive Christmas pres-

ent. Always real kind to me and my family. Always kidded with me real chummy in the halls every chance she had. Three weeks ago she gave me a ten-dollar bill and handed me this telephone number and said I should ask for a girl named Phoebe. Said I shouldn't stop calling until she gave me the word."

The magistrate was searching frantically on the docket. "It's Marie P. Turner, all right, chief," he said, finally. "P for Phoebe."

Jones went on as though he hadn't heard, speaking right to the magistrate, anywhere but where Miss Turner's eyes might be — glittering now at last with the same, fixed, hypnotized smile. He looked heart-broken, miserable, utterly demoralized. "She said this Phoebe was her good friend. Told me what kind of a girl she was, and told me lots of things about her past. Surprised me, *her* knowing her. But ten bucks is ten bucks. She said it would be a joke. She said there wasn't any limits to what I should say on the phone. Oh, Judge, I never had an idea. I never had an idea at all. How can it happen? How can a thing like this ever go and *happen*?"



IN THIS ISSUE:

TNT

Henry Kane is here with a Peter Chambers novelette that mixes a high-diving blonde and a \$50,000 policy with murder and mayhem. Richard S. Prather has thrown Shell Scott into a mess of stolen jewels and the people who stole them in a thrilling tale titled *Hot-Rock Rumble*.

TROUBLE

Harold Q. Masur is on tap with a Scott Jordan story about an empty safe deposit box — emptied on its owner's signature while the owner is in prison! And Evan Hunter starts his *Small Homicide* with a dead baby girl in a church, and takes us on the fascinating police hunt for the killer.

THREAT

Michael Fessier is back with *The Faceless Man*, the story of a sheriff, an ex-convict, and the angry mob that wanted his life. And Richard Deming has put a wounded man, his beautiful wife, and a hungry gunman together in a snowbound cabin in a story of flaring emotions and hate.

TERROR

Charles Beckman takes us to Ybor city, Tampa's Spanish district, for a murder committed in a dark alley, and the driving motivation of the man out to solve it. Emmanuel Winters is here with *The Caller*, the terrifying tale of a woman receiving phone calls from a stranger with one thing on his mind.

TIEUP

And wrapping up the issue with a solid knot is a story by Hunt Collins, plus *Crime Cavalcade*, plus Manhunt's *Movie of the Month*. A jam-packed June jamboree!