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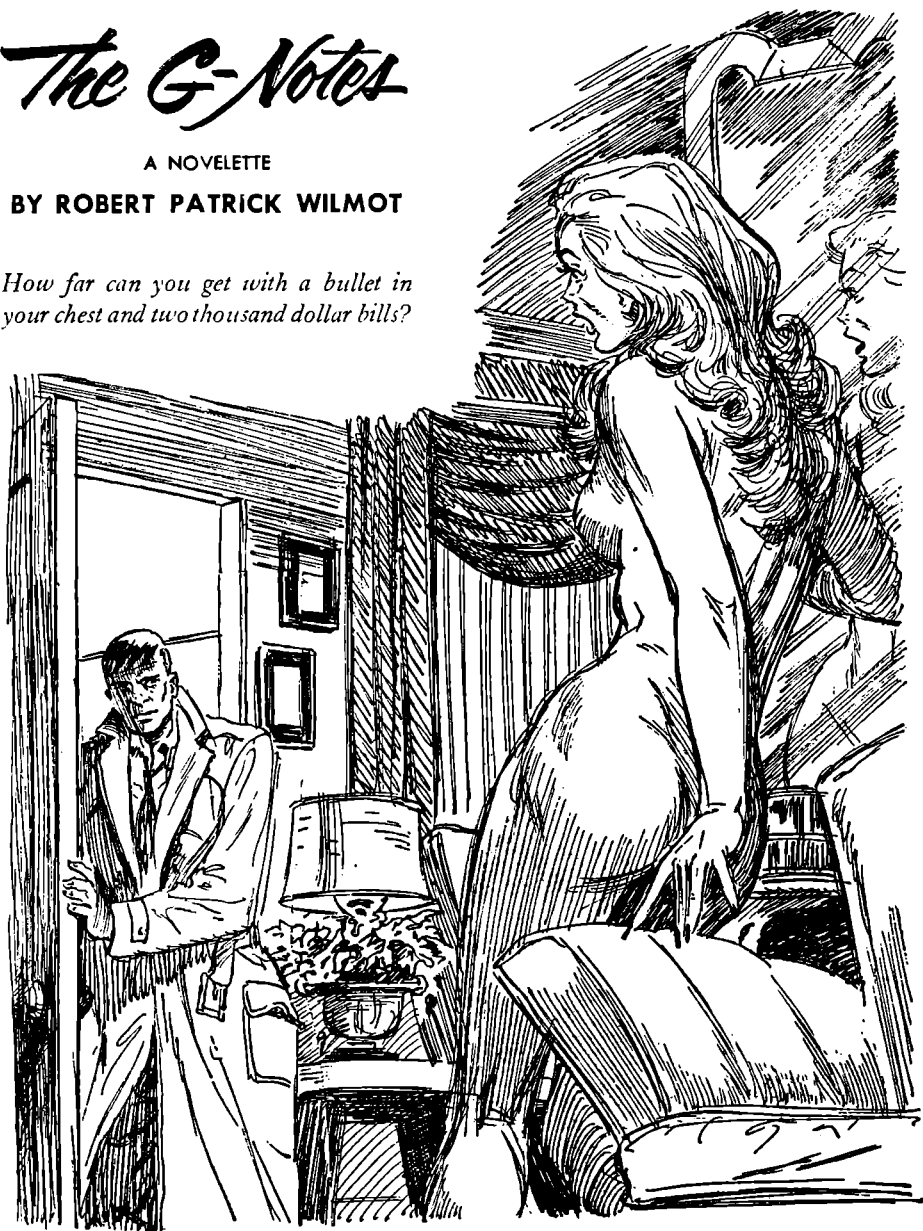
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The G-Notes

A NOVELETTE

BY ROBERT PATRICK WILMOT

*How far can you get with a bullet in
your chest and two thousand dollar bills?*



WHEN Joe Carlin was tired, the jagged scar along the left side of his jaw turned red. Now, as he stood staring down at Paul Velco, the scar was like a heavy scarlet thread stitched on his white skin.

"Don't hurry any on my account, Velco," he said quietly. "I got nothing better to do. Enjoy yourself."

Velco plucked a grape from the cluster of Concordes on the silver dish and stuffed it into a mouth that was already filled with bread and cheese. He took a long gurgling drink of wine from a tall glass, wiped his mouth, belched, and leaned back on the sofa and looked at Carlin as though Carlin were not really there at all. "I wouldn't even give you a piece of fruit," Velco said, in a voice that was thick with distaste. "I wouldn't even ask you to take a chair."

"You can keep your fruit," Carlin said. "You can keep your fruit and your chair."

Velco picked up a linen napkin that lay on the coffee table alongside the silver dishes of bread and fruit and cheese. He wiped his neck where the pink flesh hung in sweaty folds over the collar of his silk dressing gown and spat grape seeds into

the fireplace. "I oughtn't to pay you nothing," he said. "I ought to throw you right out on your can. You think I should pay you, go ahead and convince me. Make it good. Make me believe it."

"I did the job," Carlin said in his hoarse low voice. Carlin was a small man with powerful sloping shoulders and heavy hands. His sullen, handsome face was as pale and hard-looking as bleached bone. His eyes were a shade of gray-blue that was almost white, the color of dirty ice under dark brows, and his hair was Indian black.

Velco's heavy lips sneered over the rim of his glass. "You did a job!" he said savagely. "You went after the woman's stuff, and there was nobody there but her, and all you had to do was tie her up and walk out with the loot, as easy as that. So what did you do, you cheap punk?"

"You know what I done," Carlin said tonelessly. "You know what I done — so why chew me about it any more?"

"You don't give me any reason," Velco said. "A guy should have a reason for a nutty caper like that."

"I had a reason," Carlin said. "You ever pull any time, Velco?"

“What’s that got to do with it?” Velco asked, and his eyes came up quickly from the glass and stared at Carlin’s face. His eyes, under their heavy lids, were like polished jet. “What the hell kind of bug question is that to ask? You must be stir simple, asking me a question like that.”

“I was trying to tell you why I messed around with the broad,” Carlin said. “I’d been out of Auburn exactly six days when I pulled that job. You ever see this Eve LaMotte, this babe I took for the stuff?”

“I’ve seen her,” Velco said. “I’ve met her. I owned a piece of a show she was in once. I’m even a kind of an acquaintance of the guy that’s keeping her now.”

“Okay,” Carlin said. “Then you know what she’s like. A babe like you think about all day and dream about all night, when you’re doing time. Like I said, I’d been out of Auburn six days, after doing three years. I walked into her apartment and there she was and I guess I went a little crazy.”

“A little crazy,” Velco said scornfully. “A little crazy! That girl, that beautiful girl, only got out of the hospital yesterday, and it’s four weeks since you snatched the stuff.”

Carlin lifted his thick shoulders in a shrug, and a faint reminiscent smile twisted his hard mouth. “She didn’t want to play,” he said softly. “She had on a negligee a guy could push through a keyhole with his thumb, and she must have taken a bath in perfume. I shoved her in the

bathroom and when I told her I wanted more than the jewelry, she started to yell. So I clipped her. What else was there for me to do?”

Velco stood up, a big man, thick of waist and chest, with a belly that sagged over his fat thighs. “And your handkerchief came off while you were playing,” he said, moving towards the desk in the corner of the room. “The handkerchief you used for a mask fell off and Miss LaMotte got a good long look at your stupid puss. Guess what, punk?”

Carlin pulled a loose cigarette from the breast pocket of his shabby coat, lit it with steady hands. “Maybe you better tell me, Mr. Velco,” he said, his voice almost a whisper. “I never was good at guessing things. I never liked guessing games, either.”

“A smart piece of goods too, aren’t you?” Velco said. “A fresh punk as well as a creep. All right, Carlin, listen! This afternoon, LaMotte went down to police headquarters. She looked at the mugg books and identified your picture without half trying.”

Carlin let smoke dribble through his nose, and a muscle moved in his flat cheek over the red line of the scar. “I must be a pretty hot article by now,” he said, and the faint smile tugged at his lips again.

“Hot!” Velco said. “Like a home-made machine gun, you’re hot, Carlin. Your picture’ll be in every paper in town tomorrow. It’ll be in the *News* that’s on the street now.”

Carlin spat a shred of tobacco off

his tongue and took another deep drag on his cigarette.

"I should've known you'd queer it," Velco said. "I planned that heist so good I didn't think even a moron could louse it up. I told you everything you had to know to pull it clean. I did everything but write out instructions."

"Sure," Carlin said. "My part was easy. You had the dirty end of it. You had to fence the stuff. You had to carry all that heavy jewelry clear across town in your Cadillac. Tough."

Velco pulled open a drawer of the massive desk, reached inside and brought his hand out with an envelope pinched between thumb and forefinger. "I'm going to pay you, Carlin," he said, and his wide mouth smiled. "I got a reputation for being a square guy, a reputation I built up for years. When I say I'll pay, I'll pay. Even to a five-and-dime chiseler like you. Your cut in the deal is two thousand bucks."

Carlin's lips twitched into a grin that was as mirthless as the smile on Velco's face. "You said the stuff was worth a hundred and thirty grand. But I guess it was tough to fence, huh, Velco? And besides, what with all the heat I stirred up, I'm in a bad spot to argue, huh?"

"Listen to me," Velco said. "I'll tell you things you don't know, five-and-dime. I could even pick up the phone and call the cops and turn you over. And suppose you told the law I was the top man in this deal? I'll tell you what would happen, crumb.

With the connections I got, the legitimate businesses I got, there isn't a cop in town would believe you. There isn't a cop, or a judge, or a jury would believe a man like me would as much as spit on a cheap hoodlum like you, not even for practice."

The muscle moved again in Carlin's cheek and his pale eyes darkened as though some muddy fluid had boiled up suddenly in their icy depths. But Carlin made no hostile move. He spread his hands out in a wide gesture of resignation, and sighed.

"Okay, Mr. Velco," he said. "You're the big wheel, the high shot, the guy with the weight. Me, I'm just a punk like you said. So pay me off, if you don't mind. Pay me off and let me go."

Velco slid a thumb under the flap of the envelope, his belly shaking with silent laughter. "I said I'd pay," he told Carlin. "I said I'd pay, like I always pay. But did I say how? Did I say how?" From the envelope he took two new one-thousand-dollar bills and fanned them out upon the flat top of the desk.

Carlin stared at the money with his mouth open in astonishment, and Velco's laughter rose to a rumbling roar that echoed through the room.

"And just how are you going to cash these, punk?" Velco asked. "Just where and how would a petty larceny bum like you bust a grand? Especially a guy with no connections in this town. Especially a guy

that's very hot in every inch of it."

Carlin swept up the two thousand-dollar bills quickly and put them into a hip pocket, his face impassive, his eyelids lowered like white curtains over the dark fury of his eyes.

"So now, start marching, you punk," Velco said. "Crawl out of town! And while you're crawling, think about what it means to put your dirty hands on a girl like Ève LaMotte."

"So that's it," Carlin said. "You're just sore because you'd have liked to do the same. Only you haven't got the guts."

Velco slapped Carlin, hard.

Carlin was quick with his knife, whipping it out of the pocket in which he had tucked the money. But Velco was just as quick with his gun. The .38 came out of a pocket in the dressing gown, gripped in a big fist. Velco fired as the spring-blade of Carlin's knife snicked out of the handle like a darting tongue and came up in a flashing arc that did not reach its mark.

The bullet tore into the muscles of Carlin's chest where they curved out below his left armpit. It ripped through sinews and flesh and smashed into the bones of his upper arm. Carlin felt as if a sledge hammer had smashed his shoulder with one frightful, shuddering jolt of pain that turned half of his upper body to sheer ice.

Carlin reeled back, spun half way around, and the knife fell from his

hand. He felt sudden illness claw at the pit of his stomach, and nausea rolled over him in a blinding yellow-green wave that had a hard core of sound — the sound of Paul Velco's voice shouting through the fog in which Carlin reeled, waiting for a second bullet to cut him down.

"If you don't want one in the head, get out!" Velco said. "*Get going before I change my mind.*"

There was a door at the end of the room, and Carlin found himself going through it as though by blind instinct, choking back the sour stuff that rose in his throat. Beyond the door, a banister curved sharply into a stair well that was like a deep pool of shadow, and Carlin flung himself toward it, going down with reckless speed, stumbling, falling, rising to reach a frantic hand for the street door of the house.

Outside, the rain fell and Carlin went down the street that was wet and dark and gleaming with misty lamplight, and the wind blew cool against his cheeks. He went at a staggering run, heedless of where he was going so long as his legs carried him away from the house. The rain soaked through his clothes and into his wound, and Carlin felt the first searing, stabbing pain of his torn flesh and bones as numbness gave way to agony.

II

Twenty minutes later, Joe Carlin pushed the ball of his thumb hard against the button beneath the grimy

white card that read *Arnold Burkman, Attorney at Law*, and kept it there until he heard footsteps behind the door. After a while, a voice said, "Who is it?"

Carlin put his lips close to the scummed varnish. "Open up, Burkman."

The door opened a few inches. Carlin got his good shoulder against it and pushed his way inside. He closed the door quickly and stared at Arnold Burkman.

"God!" Burkman said. "So it's you." He was a tall man in dirty underwear, a gaunt man with matted, grizzled hair, and a face that was all lumps and creases and sagging hollows, like a wax mask that had been exposed to the sun.

"Yeah," Carlin said. "I got a slug in me. I need a doctor bad."

Burkman's washed-out eyes, red-rimmed and filled with sleep, fixed themselves on Carlin in a wavering stare. His eyes moved to the great stain spreading on Carlin's coat, and then down to the drops of blood dripping on the floor.

"So you copped one," the lawyer said. "And you probably left a trail of blood into the house and all the way up the stairs. Jeez, my landlady'll blow her stack."

"To hell with the landlady," Carlin said, holding his right hand inside his coat.

"You shouldn't have come here," Burkman said. "You know damn well you shouldn't have come here."

"I got to have a doctor. You're a

criminal lawyer, rumpot. You must know a croaker who'll fix me up. You got a lot of connections in this town."

Burkman shivered, hugging himself with long skinny arms. "Croakers cost money. No ethical doctor would touch you with a fork."

"So get me one that ain't ethical. I'll pay him whatever he's got to have."

"And what about me?" Burkman asked, looking away from Carlin's face, frowning at the blood stains on the floor. "It's nothing for nothing in this world and damn little for a dollar. I'd be taking a big risk helping you, Joey. I'll have to see a hundred bucks in it for myself."

"I'll pay," Carlin said.

"There's a guy I know up in Spanish Harlem," Burkman said. "Got no license because he did a jolt for some abortions, but he's good. He could patch up a hole made by a cannon. But he'll want at least a C-note for himself, too."

"He'll get it," Carlin said. His rising voice had anguish in it. "God-damn it, shyster, get the lead out. Get moving!"

Burkman reached a skinny hand inside the dirty undershirt and deliberately scratched his chest. "I'll want my dough first, Carlin," he said amiably. "Like all good hustlers, I get my money first. My hundred bucks now, before I take you to the doctor."

Carlin took a quick sliding step towards the lawyer and glared up at

him, his face shining with sweat. "You get paid at the doctor's, see? You both get paid off when I get fixed up."

"How do I know you got any money?" Burkman asked. "You've been living hand-to-mouth, waiting for the payoff on that job you pulled. How do I know you got two hundred?"

Carlin withdrew his right hand from inside of his coat. A spasm of pain rippled across his face, like a flash of lightning in an empty sky, and the scar was a line of flame across his set jaw. He wiped his bloody hand carefully on a trouser leg, reached into his hip pocket, pinched out one of the thousand-dollar bills and held it close to Burkman's face.

The lawyer stared, his big mouth gaping. "Jesus!" he said. "A grand! You know if it's good, kid? You sure it isn't queer?"

"Paul Velco gave it to me. His idea of a joke because he figured I'd have trouble getting it busted. Velco don't shove queer money."

"Velco, huh?" Burkman said softly. "So I guess you couldn't pass it, could you, boy — not in the shape you're in? But I could pass it, couldn't I? There's lots of places will cash a G-note, no questions asked, if you give them a hundred for their trouble."

"We'll give 'em the hundred," Carlin said. He pointed with his chin at a raincoat that hung on a peg on the back of the door. "I'll need your raincoat, Burkman. Tie the end of

the left sleeve together, see, and the sleeve will stop the blood from drippin' out. No hackie'll haul me if I'm bleeding all over his cab like a stuck pig."

"I hope you got cab fare," Burkman said, "because I'm absolutely Tap-City myself. I haven't got a crying dime."

"I got just four lousy bucks in the world," Carlin said, "outside of this one G-note."

Burkman shrugged and walked to a cluttered table pushed back against one wall. He lifted a nearly empty whiskey bottle and pressed the neck against his lips. Carlin crossed the room in three long strides and snatched the bottle from Burkman's hand. "The shot that's left in here goes to me," he said. "You can tie the bag on tighter after we bust the grand. But I'm the guy that's belting this one, because this is one I really need."

III

The woman who opened the door of the apartment had skin the color of cinnamon and a slim, upthrust figure like a young girl's. She stood with the door open a few inches, fumbling with a shoulder strap of her soiled satin slip, her black sloe eyes squinting into the shadows of the hall.

"You remember me, Rosa," Burkman said. "Get the hell out of the way and let us in."

The woman giggled, and stood back, and Carlin followed Burkman

down a dimly lighted hall. The lawyer opened a door and led the way into a dark and malodorous kitchen in which a fat little man sat at a littered table, hunched over a Racing Form.

"Greetings, Gradek," Burkman said. "And how's the good gray doctor?"

The fat little man had a bald, domed head that was too big for his dwarfed body. His face was round and childlike. He looked at Burkman with bleak dark eyes, and spat on the kitchen floor. "Mr. Burkman," he said bitterly. "The legal lush. The saturated shyster."

"Now that we've admired each other," Burkman said, "meet my friend, Joe. He's had a piece of bad luck. He was looking at an old gun he's got in the house, a family heirloom, see, and it went off and punctured him a little. A mere trifle, a flesh wound, Gradek, but bothersome."

"Any wound I look at is serious," Gradek said. "Any wound I look at could be dangerous — for me. I hope your boy friend remembered to bring his bankroll with him when he came."

"Look," Burkman said, and the levity was gone from his voice. "We've done business, you and I, and you know I can't afford to cheat you. The boy's got a G-note, see, a thousand-dollar bill. A good one. It's all he's got."

"I never saw a thousand-dollar bill," Gradek said. "I imagine they're

beautiful to look at." His thin, precise voice sank to a sardonic growl. "So how do I get paid out of a thousand-dollar bill? Who cashes one at eleven o'clock at night?"

"I know a loan shark who'll break it," Burkman answered. "He'd cash it at five o'clock in the morning in a graveyard. Patch this boy up. Give him a shot of something that'll keep him on his feet. When you've done that, we'll go out, the three of us, and we'll break the bill. You know I'm not going to stiff you, Gradek. Hell, there's no telling when I might even need you myself."

The fat little man stood up quickly. "I can tell right from here that the wound is quite serious," he said. "I could always make a good fast diagnosis even from quite a way off. So my price, of course, is a little more now. Say a hundred and fifty instead of one hundred dollars."

Carlin followed Gradek into a bathroom that adjoined the kitchen. The pain was like a knife in him now, a dull knife that twisted and slashed and turned into red-hot pincers whenever he moved.

"If you'll step into the bathtub, please," Gradek said, "it'll be so much easier to clean up the mess."

Carlin looked down and saw the tub, cracked and stained with rings of human grime, a shallow pit yawning beneath his wavering eyes. He kicked off his shoes and climbed into the tub, lifting his legs high, feeling the cold, slippery enamel beneath him. He stood very still, sweat run-

ning down his face, as Gradek stripped off the raincoat and blood-soaked jacket and shirt beneath.

"It's not so bad," Gradek said, looking at the crimson horror of Carlin's chest and arm. "But it's bad enough so that you won't feel like hugging your girl friend for a while. You'll need plasma, and morphine, and other things, of course. So, naturally, my price comes up a little. One hundred and seventy-five now instead of the hundred and fifty I quoted."

Carlin did not answer. He stood looking over Gradek's shoulder, watching a fat cockroach crawl between two waterpipes that rose like black fingers against the discolored wall. Arty Keller, the old con who had shared his cell at Auburn, had told him that it helped to stare at something, very hard, when you were in great pain. You looked at something hard, and you thought of things, and if you were lucky you wouldn't scream, because concentration turned the edge of pain.

Carlin stood still, his eyes fixed on the fat roach, thinking of Paul Velco's florid face, his soft smiling mouth, of the boss mobster's big belly shaking with silent laughter as he put the two thousand-dollar bills down upon the desk. He felt the sting of the needle as it bit into his flesh.

Alongside him, Burkman asked Gradek if there was a drink in the house. When the medic said no, he asked: "The alcohol in this bottle,

Doc . . . Is it drinking or rubbing stuff? And what would it do if I took a shot of it? God, I've got the grandfather of all hangovers."

"The Bowery stiffs drink it," Gradek said. "A lot of guys guzzle it, and some of them live."

Carlin watched Burkman slosh three fingers of raw alcohol into a dirty glass, dilute it with warm tap water, and swallow the mixture when the alcohol had turned to the color of thick smoke. And then, suddenly, his vision began to blur and the pain grew in him and several times he almost blacked out but managed to hold on. He didn't dare black out.

IV

It was long past midnight and they were on their way to find the man who Burkman had said would break the thousand-dollar bill. Carlin moved like a sleepwalker, guided by Gradek's hand upon his arm: dazed but his mind still on the G-note, now in Burkman's pocket. The doctor's needle had stopped Carlin's pain temporarily, but the effects of the drug lay heavily upon him, and he was glad when Gradek came to a sudden halt. They were on an empty street that ran between warehouses and tenements and there was no glimmer of light in the buildings that rose black as cliff walls toward the dark sky. It had stopped raining, but a cold wind blew strong from the east, and along the gutters, dirty, sodden scraps of paper raced like

tumbleweeds before the force of a gale.

"How much farther?" Gradek asked. "Jeez, Burkman, you think I've got legs like a kid? Why didn't we stay in the cab, instead of getting out way back up the street?"

"You spend too much time with Rosa," Burkman said. He stopped suddenly, and there was a long silence. Then he said, "But I guess we've come far enough, at that. So now you can get lost, pill roller. Beat it, before I kick your teeth in."

"Wait a minute," Gradek said, his face contorted. "You can't get away with this. You stiff me, shy-ster, and I'll get even if it's the last thing I ever do. You still have to live in this town. I got friends here, don't forget."

"Nobody has any friends," Burkman said in a calm and weary voice, and clubbed a short jolting blow into Gradek's belly. The little man bent almost double, and the lawyer jerked up a knee and drove it into Gradek's face.

The fat little man went to his hands and knees and was very sick. Burkman looked down at him with an almost impersonal stare. "You squeal on me, Gradek," he said, "and then I squeal on you. So we both go to jail, and there's no percentage in that for either of us. The way it is, you got no money, but you're still free to use your tools. You've got your knives, your needles, and you still got Rosa."

Burkman turned and, without an-

other look at Gradek, walked off into the darkness.

Carlin leaned against the wall, peering down at the man who knelt at the curb. Gradek raised a face that was chalk white. He twisted his bloodied mouth into a grimace that looked like the grin of an idiot. "Go after him, you fool!" he said. "You half-witted slob! Don't you know he's going to gyp you, too?"

Carlin found Burkman standing under a street lamp, looking up and down the street for a cab. "I didn't think I'd have to tell you, Joe," he said. "But I just cut you out of this deal, too. You got off the gravy train, back there, where Gradek fell on his face."

"I'll kill you," Carlin said, his voice thick from the drug. "You cheat me, I'll kill you someday, no matter how long I have to wait."

"Count yourself out, Joey," Burkman said. "You haven't got your shiv, you haven't got a gun, and you're so weak you couldn't knock a sick fly off a saucer of milk. So count yourself out."

Carlin said, hoarsely, "You filthy louse!"

Burkman laughed. "Before I passed out last night," he said, "I saw the early edition of the *News*, with your mug splashed all over half the second page. You haven't got a prayer, kid."

"Bust the grand," Carlin said. "Give me a break, Burkman. One little break. Bust the grand and keep it all, except enough to get me across Jersey, to a place just over

the Pennsy line. Give me a break?

"What's for you in Pennsy?" Burkman asked. "They got cops there, too, Joey. They'll scrag you wherever you go, boy."

"Give me a break, Burkman," Carlin said. "I got a cousin with a farm in Pennsylvania, a place I can hole up in until I'm well."

"Sorry, kid," the tall man said, and his voice faded as he walked away fast. "But I'm checking out of this town for a while and I figure I'll need every cent I've got. Going to try my luck somewhere else. California maybe."

Carlin's quivering legs would not carry him after Burkman. He stood still, cursing him. It was then that the two winos came out of the doorway near the corner.

He smelled the men even before he saw them, the rank sweat and alcoholic reek of unwashed flesh, the sour odor of clothes that stank from months of wearing. He turned as they came at him from the black cave that was the doorway.

One of the men was a burly giant with an empty bottle gripped in his hand. A new fear stirred in Carlin as the wino towered over him.

"Hey, Mac," the man said, his teeth chattering with cold. "How about slipping us half a buck?"

The other wino came at Carlin from his injured side and his voice was a harsh command. "A crummy four bits, mister? Or maybe we should take it out of your hide?"

"There's the guy with the dough,"

Carlin said. He pointed at Burkman's retreating back. "I ain't holding anything, boys. Not a lousy dime. But that guy there is crawling with dough. That guy there is packing a thousand bucks."

The two winos looked at him a moment, and then at one another, and then they turned and ran off toward Burkman. A moment before they reached him, Burkman turned and raised his fists, and the bottle which the big wino was carrying struck Burkman on the forehead with a splintering crash.

The lawyer screamed and fell on his back, and the smaller of the two winos brought one of his feet crashing down on Burkman's face. The lawyer raised himself on one hip and flung his arms over his head. The big wino still held the neck of the bottle in his hand and the cruel and jagged fragment of the bottle remained like a broken-rimmed goblet in his fist. He drove the broken glass into Burkman's face and then stepped back, whooping with drunken, maniacal laughter, and the smaller drunk staggered at the fallen man and kicked him again and again. Carlin stood watching from the shadows as Burkman's sagging features lost all shape and identity, like red clay on a potter's wheel.

Carlin stepped back into a doorway and watched the winos go through Burkman's pockets until they found the thousand-dollar bill. He watched them both grab it at the same time and saw that neither one

was going to give it up. Each of them held onto part of the bill, and with their free hands they started slamming at each other's face, clawing and tearing at each other. The sight and the feel of that money in their hands seemed to drive them to fury. Carlin watched the G-note as it was snatched from hand to hand, and torn apart. He saw the torn and crumpled tiny pieces of it flutter down to the muck and mud of the street, and move away in the heavy wind.

Carlin left them still fighting and walked to the corner, turned into a side street and staggered on, moving into the teeth of the wind. When he could walk no farther he stepped into the door of a vacant building and sat on the cold floor with the collar of Burkman's raincoat pulled up around his face. He fell asleep almost instantly.

When he awoke, stiff with cold, with the knife of pain twisting again in his chest and arm, he saw that the darkness beyond the doorway was growing thin, washed to the color of dirty wool by the faint and indefinite light of the moment before dawn.

V

Rosa ushered Carlin into Gradek's bedroom and slipped away without saying a word or making a sound.

Gradek lay under a torn crazy quilt, on a tarnished brass bed. His swollen lips were the color of grapes. He did not seem surprised to see Carlin again.

"I thought maybe you'd be around," Gradek said. "It isn't as though you had so much choice, is it, Joe? To a boy in your position, I'm like the Johns Hopkins and the Mayo Brothers rolled into one. You could say I had a sort of medical monopoly, in a way of speaking." His fingers came up to touch his mouth. "I could use the Mayo Brothers, myself. I damn near never got home after the way that bastard kned me. But I'll get him for that. If I have to —"

"Forget it," Carlin said, tiredly. "Burkman already got his. But good." He told Gradek about Burkman and the winos. When he finished, he leaned against a crumbling wall that was half covered with photographs of nude girls, and wiped sweat from his grimy face. "I came to make a deal," he said. "I want to make a deal, Gradek." He sucked air into lungs that seemed filled with hot sand, and started to speak again.

Gradek waited, cocking a polite but skeptical eyebrow, but Carlin could not get the words past his lips. He fell forward in a long, sliding fall, and lay face downward beside the bed.

When Carlin recovered consciousness, he was lying upon the bed, stripped of everything except his bandages, and Gradek was standing beside him with a hypodermic syringe in his hand. He was wearing a long-tailed cotton shirt that flapped about his knees, and a cigar butt smoldered in the corner of his mouth.

"You passed out, Joey. Exhaustion, pain, loss of blood. Rosa and I thought we'd be doing you a kindness by undressing you and putting you to bed. And incidentally, Joey, we found your second thousand-dollar bill."

"Okay," Carlin said, "so you found it." He was too tired to care very much, either way.

"You must understand that you're in pretty bad condition," Gradek said. "There's a bullet in you, Joey, lodged pretty deep, and it should be removed. There were several reasons why I couldn't remove it, last night. I didn't have enough morphine on hand to really knock you out, for one thing. And if I had, you would have been too sick to go after the money. You understand, don't you?"

Carlin said nothing, and Gradek's amiable voice went on. "So, what could I do, except sew you up with the slug in you? A pretty unethical procedure, I'll admit, but you can't eat ethics or wear them, or sleep with them, either."

He sat down on a chair and stared thoughtfully at the floor. "I could take the slug out of you today, Joey, but after that, what? You're a sick boy. You need some place to stay until you get well. Also, you're hot. You're hotter than young love in a haymow in August."

Carlin cursed him feebly.

"Of course I could just turn you out when I'd patched you up," Gradek said. "But you'd only fall down in the street, and then the cops

might pick you up, and you'd probably tell them about me. On the other hand, I can't keep you here. It's occurred to me that maybe you have some place you can go. If you've got any such place in mind, tell me, and perhaps I'll help you to get there."

Hope stirred in Carlin. "There's a farm in Pennsylvania," he murmured. "Just across the Jersey line. If I could get there, I'd be all right."

Gradek lifted the long-tailed shirt and scratched one of his fat thighs. "Pennsylvania is a long way," he said. "I hadn't thought of going that far. But I suppose, since you're a reasonable fellow, and can't expect to get that thousand dollars back, I might consider it. I can borrow a friend's car — for a price, of course."

"That's wonderful of you," Carlin said bitterly. "That's the biggest-hearted offer I ever heard."

Gradek rose from his chair. "I'll dig the lead out of you at the farm, son. It won't kill you to pack it a few hours more. I could dig it out of you here, of course, but you'd be weaker, and it'd be a mess, and Rosa doesn't like me cutting people in here." He shook the hypodermic syringe, and smiled. "I'll just sink this spear into you, Joey, and you'll get some rest. Along towards dark, we'll shove off for Pennsy."

Carlin scarcely felt the needle. It was a pin-prick of minute pain, dissolving almost instantly into a feeling of drowsy pleasure as a warm pink mist closed in about him. . . .

VI

Carlin awoke to find Gradek gently shaking him, and beyond the window the light was blue with autumnal dusk. Gradek was neatly dressed in a shabby tweed suit and a white shirt and polka dot tie. He had a cup in his hand, and he held it to Carlin's lips.

"Drink this, Joey," Gradek said. "It'll help pull you out of the fog. You really were sleeping. I dressed your wounds while you slept, and my Rosa gave you a nice sponge bath. Boy, you needed that bath. You know what Rosa said? She said, 'Aye! but thees one steenks!'"

Carlin swallowed some of the bitter fluid, retched, and then emptied the cup as Gradek pressed it relentlessly against his lips.

"I've got some clothes for you," the doctor said. "Not new, but clean. The car's outside, and we can leave as soon as you're dressed. But I'll have to make one stop, in Manhattan, to break the thousand-dollar bill."

"Okay," Carlin said. "Okay, Gradek."

"On second thought," Gradek said, "I'd better stop at a post office too. So that I can mail the money to myself. Just in case you should get any bright ideas, Joey, after I've hauled you to Pennsylvania. Just in case you should turn out to be ungrateful for what I've done."

He set the cup down on the floor, picked up a pair of faded khaki trou-

sers from a small pile of clothing on the bed, and began to draw the trousers on over Carlin's legs. "Sorry there's no underwear," Gradek said. "I couldn't seem to find a pair of shorts that were clean."

He pulled the trousers up around Carlin's hips, then said: "I gave a lot of thought to the matter of where I was going to break the grand note. I was getting discouraged, and then I happened to think of the Plume Club. You know the Plume Club, Joey? No? Well, perhaps it's a little too refined for your type of character. But, for your information, the Plume Club is a private drinking club, in the sixties.

"Only it's something more than just a private guzzling joint," Gradek went on as he picked up a torn cotton sock. "What it really is, Joey, is a very high-class brothel. One of the finest in the world. At the Plume Club, you can get a good dinner, and a good bottle of wine. And if you want — if you have the price, of course — you can dally with a really beautiful girl. Not you, really, Joey. You're in no condition for that kind of stuff."

Carlin ran his tongue across his parched lips, and said nothing.

Gradek lifted one of Carlin's feet and began to ease the sock on gently over his toes. "I happen to have done some business with Grace Jones," he said. "Miss Jones is the proprietor of the Plume, and a very nice woman, too. When I called, she said she would be pleased to cash a G-note —

for a ten per cent rake-off, of course.”

Gradek finished pulling on the sock, and made a flourishing gesture with his plump hands. “So, I have ordered a steak dinner for six o’clock, a dinner and a good bottle of wine. Maybe you might feel like eating a little, maybe, but I don’t think you will feel like trifling with any lovely girls, Joey, huh? No, not tonight.”

VII

Grace Jones had cowslip-colored hair, a face that was pink and slick, like a well-iced cake, and a body that was apparently losing a war against old age and excess flesh. She stared at the thousand-dollar bill, turning it over and over in her hands, and finally lifted her cool gaze to Gradek’s face and gave the little fat man a fleeting smile. She paid no attention to Carlin.

“It certainly looks like the McCoy, Doc,” she said in a hard baritone drawl. “And anyway, you wouldn’t be simple enough to try to palm off a bum G-note on me. But you must have taken an elephant’s liver out, to earn this much dough in one slice.”

Gradek cut a chunk of rare beef from the slab of red meat on the table in front of him, forked it into his bruised mouth, chewed, and washed the meat down with a gulp of red wine.

“Confidentially, Miss Jones,” he said, “I’ve performed an operation that will make medical history. I’ve succeeded in grafting a chorus girl’s

legs onto the trunk of a spinster school teacher, in Queens. There isn’t a boy in her class who will ever play truant again.”

Carlin rested his head against a wall of the small, curtained private dining room. He sat with his eyes closed, because even the soft light of the room seemed to burn his eyeballs. The fever had given way to chills now, and his body shook as the cold seeped deep into his bones.

He heard the thousand-dollar bill crackle, and the scrape of the woman’s chair as she pushed it back, and then Grace laughed, joggling the table as she arose.

“Your friend doesn’t look very happy, does he, Doc?” she asked. “What is it, hangover? Or has he been taking some of your pills?”

“He’s a man troubled by conscience,” Gradek said, his mouth filled with food.

“He looks sort of familiar, too,” the woman said. “Seems like I’ve seen him somewhere before. But not here, I don’t think. Somehow he doesn’t look like a customer of ours.”

“Don’t let his dirty raincoat fool you,” Gradek answered. “Or the rest of his sloppy clothes. My friend is a rich eccentric. He could buy and sell this place.”

Carlin heard the woman’s thickening body move away from the table and the sound of a door as it was softly closed. He forced himself to open his eyes. He saw Gradek’s face, flushed and sweating, and noisily chewing food. He let the leaden

weights of his eyelids fall down again.

"Please, Joey," Gradek said, "don't go out of your way to look like a zombie. Do me a favor, kid. I took a lot of risks bringing you in here, as hot as you are, even at an hour when there's nobody around."

"You'd have taken a lot of risk leaving me sit out in the car, too."

"All right. But, please, if anyone else comes in here, make like a living person."

Carlin opened his eyes again and stared at Gradek for a moment, and his eyes were pools of shadow under knit black brows. "Speaking of risks, Gradek," he said softly, "something's been bothering me. It could be that I'd wind up very dead, somewhere out in the Jersey marshes. Never get to Pennsy. A thing like that could happen, couldn't it, Doc?"

Gradek hacked at his steak with a sharp-bladed, bone-handled knife. He made a wry face. "Anything is possible in this world," he said. "But have you got anybody else to cart you around? If not, shut up. You've got to depend on me, Joey." He half rose from his chair, using his fork as a spear with which to reach a plate of rolls.

Carlin moved quickly. He made a swift movement with his hand, caught up another bone-handled knife, and thrust it into the raincoat pocket. The smell of the half-raw steak clawed at his nostrils as he leaned over the table, and his stomach seemed to constrict and then rise like a rocket against his throat.

"The first door to the left, down the hall," Gradek said. "I can imagine how you feel."

Carlin rose unsteadily, went to a door in the rear of the room, and pulled it open. He stumbled down an unlighted hallway that smelled of cold cooking and stale tobacco and perfume. He found the first door to his left and clawed his way into a room that was small and not luxurious. He was very sick in the close, bad-smelling darkness of the room. When he had finished, he pushed the single small window open and let the cool evening air blow in upon his face.

After a while, he went back into the hallway, but slowed when he heard the sound of heavy footsteps and loud voices from the private dining room. He took a few wavering steps forward, and leaned against a wall. He recognized Grace Jones' baritone as the other voices fell away.

"These gentlemen here are from the D.A.'s office, Gradek," the woman said. "They say they want to talk to you."

"Sure," Gradek said. "Talk all you want — and the first thing you can tell me is what this is all about."

"They know about the G-note," Grace said. "I'm sorry, Gradek, but I got caught short. They came in here and braced me, and how did I know they've been watching you for a long while? I want to stay in business, don't I? All right, so I figure it's the G-note they're after,

and I turn it over to them. So what?"

"But what have I done?" Gradek asked, and his thin voice rose in a kind of blustering scream. "Is it a crime to eat a good dinner, to drink a nice bottle of wine? Is it a crime to have a thousand-dollar bill?"

A man laughed, his voice a sardonic bass growl. "Maybe it is a crime to be passing out thousand-dollar bills, Pop — unless you can damned well explain where you got 'em."

"I would hate to be the D.A.," Gradek said in a bitter voice. "I would hate to be the D.A. and be hanging by my ears until he learns where I got that grand."

"What's the use, Gradek?" another male voice asked. "We saw you park that heap outside, and you got a whole briefcase full of surgical instruments in the car. Tell us some good reasons, Gradek. Tell us why an ex-con with no M.D. license should be packing a bunch of croaker's tools."

"I'll tell you a reason, flatfoot," Gradek said. "A reason you wouldn't have intellect enough to understand. Before a stupid, bungling jury and a moronic judge committed the criminal error of sending me to prison, I was a great surgeon. A great surgeon. I carry my old surgical instruments with me because of a sentimental attachment I have to them — like a great violin virtuoso who can no longer play might still carry his violin."

Grace Jones said sadly: "It's no

use, Doc. They got to Rosa. They told me that. They made her spill her guts. Your racket's finished."

Gradek shrugged heavily, and shambled to his feet. "All right," he said. "Let's go."

"One thing first," one of the men from the D.A.'s office said. "Where's the guy Grace said was with you — the guy looked like he'd been on a ten day diet of slow pills? Where'd the sleeper go, Gradek? Where'd he go?"

"For your information," Gradek said, "he's in the john. Sick. On account of eating some of the steak Grace served me, and drinking a glass of her wine. Even the food in prison is better than the stuff she serves here." He spat, and turned his broad back in her direction. "Let's go," he said again.

Carlin was already back in the toilet room when he heard the heavy footsteps coming down the hallway. He locked the door, and turned on both water taps. As fists pounded on the door, he climbed over the sill of the window and dropped into the alley beyond.

VIII

The living room of the apartment was long and wide, with three white walls that gleamed like old ivory in the semi-darkness. Carlin stood very still in the center of the room, on a piled carpet thick enough to muffle an elephant's tread. Listening intently, he heard no sound except the whistling hoarseness of his

own labored breathing, the ticking of an Ormolu clock on a curved mantelpiece beneath a tall mirror that reflected the hollow-cheeked, pain-ridden mask of his pale face.

He turned away from his reflection, moved silently towards the bedroom door. Light shimmered softly on the bone-handled knife as he drew it from his pocket, held it behind him, against the skirt of the raincoat that Burkman had once owned.

On the threshold of the door, Carlin sucked in his breath, held it as he moved cat-footed into the room in which Eve LaMotte stood naked before a full-length mirror.

Carlin stared at her firm, pointed breasts, at the soft curve of her stomach, mirrored in a long panel of shining glass; at the clean lines of her white flanks and the profiled breasts. Her flame-colored hair rippled about her white shoulders, and her back was a flawless, deeply indented marble wedge, tapering into a slender waist.

Carlin moved up behind her. He held the long supple blade of the steak knife pressed against his forearm, and he let his knuckles touch the warm curve of her throat.

"Don't yell," he whispered. "Don't make a sound. Just do what I tell you, and you won't get hurt."

He felt the girl shudder beneath his clenched fist, saw the dark eyes jerk up and go wide with terror, looking at his reflection in the glass. Carlin ground his knuckles against

her mouth, muffling the scream that rose in her throat. "Keep quiet," he said. "You yell, and I'll kill you. You make any noise, I'll kill you. Do what I say, and I won't hurt you at all. So help me, I won't."

The frightened eyes stayed on his face a moment, and then she shivered and hunched her shoulders in a despairing shrug. She made a gesture of resignation with her narrow hands and spoke with her lips soft and moist against his fist. "I won't yell," she said. "Take your hand off me. I promise I won't yell."

Carlin withdrew his fist, keeping the knife carefully hidden from her sight. "I don't want you," he said. "I don't want you the . . . the way I did before. I didn't come for that."

The girl moved away from him slowly and sat down before her vanity. She drew her long legs up onto the seat and wrapped her bare arms about them. "Why, then?" she asked, her teeth chattering behind the sensuous lips. "Why did you come? You cleaned me out last time. You took every bit of jewelry Eddie'd given me in four years — in all the time we've been together. I haven't anything of value; nothing but a few dollars in my purse."

"Sure, sure, baby," Carlin said. "Listen, I want two things. To get even with a guy, and to grab some getaway dough. You're going to help me do both."

She stared at him without saying anything, and he let the knife fall into a pocket of the raincoat. He

crossed to the wide bed that filled a corner of the room and picked up the negligee that lay upon a silken pillow. The negligee was a filmy cloud of almost transparent silk, the same one she had been wearing the first time Carlin had seen her. Carlin sighed and turned and brought the negligee back to her, and stood over her as she drew the clinging green stuff around her body.

"Here's how you're going to help me," he said. "You're going to make a phone call — to Paul Velco."

"You mean that fat politician I sometimes see around town?"

"That's him," Carlin said. "A guy who's got a lot of things, including a yen for Eve LaMotte, a yen that's eating him alive. So you're going to call him. You're going to tell Velco that your boy friend Eddie's out of town, and that he left you no dough, and that you can't cash a check. Then you'll tell Velco you're all alone, and ask him will he lend you a couple hundred bucks, to last you until Eddie gets home. You'll tell him that you're alone, and he'll bring you the money, personally, here. And you tell him to give four rings, two long, two short, so that you'll know it's him."

"Take it easy! God!" Her eyes were slightly narrowed now. While they waited, the girl asked him, "How'd you get in here, anyhow? I paid a guy ten bucks to change the lock on the door, after your last little visit."

"It was easy," Carlin said. "I've had a lot of practice with locks. I

heard the water running in the bathtub, and it covered what little noise I made. I didn't make much."

The doorbell of the apartment was a soft chime, and its music came to them then, in two long, and two short bursts of pleasant sound.

Carlin came to his feet like a marionette jerked by violent strings. His legs were shaking, but he crossed to the girl quickly and pushed his face close to hers.

"Now listen to me!" he snarled. "Get what I tell you! I'll be behind the door when you open it. You turn right around and come back here, and he'll follow you, and I'll close the door. I'll take it from there."

Eve LaMotte looked at his face, and the dark eyes were round with fear. "What are you going to do?" she asked. "You're not going to —?" She choked as she looked into his eyes. "Oh, God, no! Not here!"

"Do like I said," Carlin told her, "and maybe you won't get hurt."

He was behind the door when the girl opened it to admit Velco. He stood so close to him that he could smell the perfume and talcum and pomade aroma of the big man as he followed the girl out of the hallway and into the dim light of the living room. He gripped the knife handle so tightly that his fingernails were like sharp blades digging into his palms. He moved soundlessly to the end of the short hallway, and paused.

Velco chuckled, a soft, growling

noise deep in his throat. "What a surprise, Baby, your call was," he said to the girl. "Last thing I expected, but I don't have to tell you it's all right. Plenty all right."

The girl laughed, a nearly hysterical cackle.

"That stinking Eddie, to leave you without dough," Velco said softly. "But, it's a break for me." He nudged her, and began to laugh.

To Joe Carlin, the big man's laughter sounded like tearing silk. He saw the vast belly shake. Then he came into the room, on tiptoe, and halted six feet away from Velco's back.

"You know something, baby," Velco went on. "I didn't bring you the lousy two C's you asked for. I thought it would be nicer if I brought you a special little present. A little token of how much a guy like me appreciates a really beautiful dame."

Carlin heard the stiff crackle of paper as Velco reached a hand into the breast pocket of his coat. The light shone dully on an envelope in his pudgy fingers.

Velco purred, "Me, I like to do everything the big way. The great big way. So, you ask me to lend you a couple of hundred dollars, instead, I bring you *this* — as a gift. Here, baby — a thousand-dollar bill."

Velco's words burst and echoed in Joe Carlin's brain. *A thousand-dollar bill.* Not the two hundred bucks Velco should have brought, the two hundred bucks that would have taken Carlin to Pennsylvania and the farm where he could get well. No! Velco had to big-dog it with *a thousand-dollar bill!*

Carlin heard himself yell, a choking, sobbing scream that seemed to rip at his throat, a shriek that turned somehow into a swelling crimson bubble within his head, and broke against his skull in a tearing burst of pain. He plunged forward and drove the steak knife into Velco's broad back. From the corner of his eye, he saw the girl as she ran, screaming hysterically, out of the apartment door. Then he twisted the knife loose and buried the long blade in Velco's body again.

He was still crouched near Velco's corpse when the police came. He flung himself at them, but the knife was deep in Velco's back, and there was nothing in Carlin's hand but a torn and bloody fragment of a thousand-dollar bill.

He ran straight at the cop who shouted at him to halt. The cop shouted again, and then, when Carlin came screaming on, the cop fired straight into Carlin's writhing face.



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!