

THE HIGH-TENSION MAGAZINE

INSPIRED BY THE CBS RADIO AND TELEVISION PROGRAM SERIES **SUSPENSE**

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No possible slip-up;
no fuss, no witnesses.
You had to hand it
to this careful killer

The perfectly

F. HUGH HERBERT

Having completely conquered radio, cinema and stage, the versatile F. Hugh here turns to crime—or rather, returns. For the mystery story is an old love of his, and were his gifts in other directions less demanding, possibly by this time he would have concocted as outstanding a piece in this field as his "Kiss and Tell" was on the stage. It ran on Broadway a mere matter of three years! His most recent play is "The Moon Is Blue," which opened to New York's enthusiastic notices just this past March.

In the warm tale of cold death which you are about to read, Mr. Herbert demonstrates a truly mature pen. The delicate motivation is exceedingly skillful. Each character, even the dead one, lives.

I'VE BEEN QUESTIONED a lot, naturally, but I'm writing this now not under duress. It's simply that I want to put it down on paper. Call it a confession if you want to; a "human document" if you like. It makes no difference, now. Nothing does. Anyway it's the truth, the whole truth. So help me.

Yes—I murdered my wife. Yesterday, Saturday, at about 11:45 A. M. I wasn't crazy then; I don't think I'm crazy now. It just seemed like a good idea at the time. That isn't intended to sound tough or callous or flippant. It's the truth. It's the only explanation I can offer. *It seemed like*

a hell of a good idea. Two hours before I killed her I swear I'd never even dreamed of harming her. I had no reason to. I wasn't in love with Connie, I'll admit, and I never had been in love with her, and she knew it, and accepted it, and we always got along fine. We'd been married nearly three years and never once had a fight or even a scene. Matter of fact we managed to have a lot of fun. Certain things she did used to irritate me, but that's only natural in any marriage. I've no doubt lots of things I did irritated her.

I've been wondering, during these past twenty-four hours, whether Con-

calm murder



nie ever thought of killing me. When you've just killed someone you get to wondering about a lot of things. Of course, Connie didn't have to kill me to get rid of me, if she wanted to get rid of me. She could have just kicked me out. I guess that's the difference. I couldn't have kicked her out, at least not on the same terms. . . .

My name is Alan Blake. I'll be twenty-five next October 20th—if I don't go to the gas chamber before then. I married Connie when I was just twenty-two. She said she was thirty-seven at the time, but I think she may have shaded it a couple of years. She'd been married and divorced twice already. It was my first go. I was just out of college.

You see, Connie had a lot of money. I don't know how much, and I never really made any effort to find out, but it was plenty. And Connie was cute. In the right light she could have passed for thirty. She had a good skin, and a cute little figure. She never weighed more than a hundred and five pounds. I always looked older than my age. People knew, of course, that she was older than I, but I don't think they figured it for more than eight or ten years at the most.

Naturally everybody said I married her for her money, and everybody was right. Connie knew it, and I knew it. I'd never had a dime in my life, and I didn't particularly like the idea of working, and then Connie came along, and I guess she fell for me, and it was all very simple. Nobody was kidding anybody. It was a

deal, and it suited both of us fine. People gave the marriage six months at best, and said so. Connie didn't give a damn what people said, nor did I. Well, we fooled them about that, anyway. It lasted nearly three years. I don't think Connie ever regretted it. She always seemed perfectly happy. We managed to have a lot of fun.

CONNIE owned a lot of real estate. We lived in a house she had in Beverly Hills. A small house, but with grounds covering three acres. There's a tennis court, and then, way off beyond the garden, there's a swimming pool and bathhouses surrounded by tall shrubbery. You can't see the pool at all from the house or road. A swell place for sun baths. I like sun bathing better than almost anything else. I guess I was just born lazy.

Yesterday morning I got up about eight. I looked into Connie's room but didn't wake her. I went down to the pool and had a swim, and then I lay around for maybe half an hour and dried off in the sun. Then I walked back to the house in my trunks and asked Vivian to fix me some breakfast and serve it on the patio.

Vivian is Connie's personal maid. We have a couple, too, but yesterday was their day off. Vivian is about twenty-three, I guess, and quite pretty. Most of our so-called "friends" have gone out of their way to tell Connie that she was crazy to hire such a pretty young girl. Meaning with *me* around, of course. Connie

always laughed at them. She used to tell me about it. I could see their point, of course. Vivian is really quite cute. But she was crazy about Connie, never more than polite and friendly to me. I never gave the girl a thought, as a woman I mean, and I never stepped out of line for an instant. Nor did she. I just want to make that clear out of fairness to both of us, since Vivian is surely under heavy questioning right now.

I'd finished my ham and eggs, and was reading the paper when Connie finally came down to breakfast on the patio. She was wearing a skimpy, childish, pink playsuit. There was a sort of calculated little-girl quality about it, with a tiny ruffle of lace around the panties and a gingham bow in back. I'd never seen it before, and I didn't like it. That was one of the things about Connie that irritated me. I always wished she wouldn't wear clothes like that. She was tiny, and she had a cute little figure all right, but I always winced when she went cutie-pie in her wardrobe. After all Connie was over forty, and you only had to look at her hands to know it.

Connie took the newspaper away from me and perched herself on my knees. She said: "Hello, darling—sorry I'm late," and then she kissed me on the mouth. I felt uncomfortable. That was another thing about her. There's a time and place for everything. Few people feel amorous at breakfast.

Connie took a napkin, wiped the lipstick from my face, went to her chair and tinkled the little silver bell

for Vivian. The girl came in with a small pile of mail. Connie slit the envelopes neatly and deftly with the tip of her forefinger. I sat and watched her hands. They were beautifully groomed, but obviously the hands of a woman past forty. I remember thinking that manicures and cosmetics can't do a thing for a woman's hands. I remember thinking that by contrast with her babyish playsuit, the hands looked even older than they normally did. I remember thinking that I always liked Connie best when we went out at night and she wore gloves.

Connie looked up at me suddenly and, pursing her lips, blew me a kiss. I pretended to catch it somewhere in left field, but again I felt uncomfortable. I wished she wouldn't always try to act cute. I didn't mind so much, funnily enough, when there were others present, because she was small and pretty enough to get away with it. But when we were alone it made me feel uncomfortable. It always seemed so unnecessary.

I guess I must have been frowning because she smiled at me and said: "You look very sleek and gorgeous this morning, Alan—but why so sinister?"

I grinned and told her to cut it out. "Sleek" was one of her favorite adjectives for me, and it always rubbed me the wrong way.

I can remember now, looking back at it, that all these little things were irritating me, making me vaguely uncomfortable, but that was as far as it went at the moment. There had been times, during our marriage,

when it had gone a bit further. I'll admit there had been times when I would feel a sudden rush of disgust, almost to the point of hating her. But it had never crystallized into anything. Connie made few enough demands, God knows. And thanks to her I had a home and three servants, a swimming pool, a new Cadillac, a raft of amusing friends. Connie always had a lot of friends. They were nearly all quite wealthy, and much younger than Connie. She liked going around with a young crowd.

Vivian came out onto the patio with the telephone extension and plugged it into the jack. Connie picked up the phone. It was Maureen, a friend of Connie's. Maureen is about twenty, I guess, and pretty. I remember thinking, when I heard Connie speak her name over that phone, that Maureen would look cute in that baby suit of Connie's. She was under contract to some studio for a few months, and they used her all the time for their cheesecake stills.

Connie said that Maureen wanted to come over for a swim and would I like to go and pick her up? Her car was in the shop. I wasn't too keen. I said maybe later I'd think about it. Maureen was around the house quite a lot and I wasn't too keen. Frankly, she bothered me. Too young, too pretty and unscrupulous. And she plays around a lot. At this moment she probably hates my guts. She didn't yesterday. It was one of those things. There was nothing overt, but it was one of those things.

A guy can tell. I don't know whether to say that she was on the make for me, or me for her. But it was there. I'm sure Connie had no idea. She was crazy about Maureen, who was always gay and amusing.

Anyway, Connie told her I might pick her up later, and then hung up. Vivian came back onto the patio with Connie's breakfast. She looked pert and pretty in her neat uniform. Connie asked me if we had any dates during the day and when I said no she told Vivian she could have the day off if she wanted to. She was very fond of Vivian.

While they were chatting I got up and stretched myself. The sunlight felt good out there on the patio. I felt good all over. Connie watched me and laughed.

"You do that beautifully," she said. "Doesn't he stretch nicely, Vivian?" I felt like a fool. I think Vivian felt uncomfortable, too. She didn't answer. I could feel my skin prickle with irritation, almost with rage. It was the sort of damn silly remark Connie was always making. She often drew her maid into our conversations, and it always made me feel foolish and uncomfortable. I can't explain why, but it did.

I walked across the patio. The French windows leading to the living room were open. I stepped inside to get a cigarette and then I noticed a large brown stain on the light colored carpet. I came back onto the patio and asked Connie what had happened. She hesitated a moment, and I noticed that she and Vivian exchanged a quick glance.

"A slight domestic accident," Connie said finally. "I spilled a cup of coffee."

I remember thinking that it was nice of Connie to take the rap for her maid, but rather foolish. It was no skin off my nose who spilled the coffee. Vivian wasn't my maid, it wasn't my carpet, and I wasn't paying the bill to have it cleaned.

I'm putting in all this detail for a reason. I'm trying to explain, if only to myself, that I was perfectly rational and calm and logical and normal at that moment. When Connie seemed to be taking the blame for this spilled coffee, I remember thinking that she was always very considerate of people, especially servants. I remember thinking of her with admiration, almost with affection.

I flopped into a chair in the sun and asked Connie whether she had tripped over one of the silly little tables we have in the living room. I was just making conversation. I really didn't give a damn how it had happened. I remember thinking that recently I had always been glad to latch on to any excuse to make casual conversation. Being alone with Connie was making me nervous.

Connie started to answer but before she could get it out Vivian, who was on her way back to the kitchen, turned around suddenly. "Mr. Blake," she said soberly, "Mrs. Blake fainted—that's how come she spilled it. I thought you ought to know about it, Mr. Blake."

She looked at Connie almost apologetically, and then walked off the patio.

CONNIE was stirring her coffee irritably and I could see she was furious with Vivian.

"Fainted?" I asked. "What does she mean—when did you faint?"

"The girl's a fool," said Connie. "I could wring her neck. I *told* her not to worry you."

I think maybe the whole idea came to me in that moment, but I'm not sure. I asked Connie for details and I remember that I was conscious that my voice sounded quite hoarse and unnatural.

"Oh, Alan," said Connie, "it's so silly. Nothing to worry about, really—I just felt a little dizzy, that's all, and I guess I passed out a few seconds. It's nothing, honestly. The doctor said so."

I asked her when she had spoken to the doctor. I guess the idea must have been forming then already. I remember thinking that Vivian knew about her fainting and I wanted to know for certain whether she'd really checked with the doctor.

Connie said she'd phoned her doctor right away. She said he blamed it on two sets of tennis she had played after a heavy lunch. She said, "Don't look so alarmed, darling—it really doesn't mean anything—it's not the first time I've fainted."

I'm pretty sure the idea was already well under way by then. I remember filing away in my mind the fact that this was not the first time, that this was just one in a series of fainting spells.

I lit another cigarette and I remember that my hands were trembling. I wondered if Connie would

notice it. She seemed to and she was concerned about me. She said, "Now Alan, please stop worrying—it was just a little dizzy spell. Ten minutes afterward I felt fine. I went for a swim in the pool."

"You must be crazy," I told her. "If you're given to fainting, for God's sake stay out of the pool."

Connie only smiled at me and told me not to worry.

I got up from my chair in the sun and walked slowly over to the shady side of the patio. By that time the whole idea was working itself out. I could feel my heart pounding against my chest and I remember that I shivered. It was probably ten degrees cooler in the shade but that wasn't why I shivered. I remember thinking that in that instant, moving from sunlight to shadow, I had become a potential murderer. From that moment on I was plotting, planning, building my alibis, considering my defenses, scheming, calculating the risks. From that instant on, in cold blood, on our own patio, I was planning how to murder Connie.

Connie was now dividing her attention between breakfast and the mail. I straddled a chair in the shadow and watched her, fascinated. The sunlight was cruel to her. I could see the tiny lines about her eyes, the myriad tiny little wrinkles that made her silly playsuit so incongruous.

My heart was still pumping noisily but in my mind the plan continued to take shape. The facts and events upon which it was based were fitting neatly into a fascinating pattern.

There was a crazy rhythm to the racing of my heart and I found myself repeating the purpose of my plan to this awful rhythm—*I AM GOING TO MURDER CONNIE—I AM GOING TO MURDER CONNIE—AND I AM GOING TO GET AWAY WITH IT—AWAY WITH IT—AWAY WITH IT.*

I remember distinctly that I pressed my lips together. I was afraid I might be forming the words visibly.

SUDDENLY I became quite calm. My heart ceased pounding. The shocking decision had been made, and now I found I could contemplate my plan and my victim quite dispassionately. I was going to murder Connie but I felt no hatred for her nor, at that moment, even any irritation. I looked at her pretty shoulders and I even felt a sudden rather startling desire for her. . . .

Maybe half an hour later Vivian came out on the patio. She was dressed for the street and asked Connie if she might go now.

From where we live it's quite a walk to the boulevard. I said I would drive Vivian to the bus. I went to my room and without taking off my swimming trunks I pulled on slacks and a sport shirt.

When I came down Connie was in the hall on her way back to the patio. She asked me again to pick up Maureen and she suggested that maybe I'd like to ask the McAlisters over for a swim. The McAlisters are a young couple whom Connie liked very much. I said sure, it sounded like a good idea.

Then I took the Cadillac and shot Vivian down to the boulevard. There is a bus stop right on the corner but Vivian said she was going somewhere downtown and I said I would drive her part of the way. I had my reasons.

Once we were on Sunset Boulevard heading east I stepped on the gas and pretty soon I was hitting well over seventy. Vivian pointed to the speedometer and warned me that I would probably get a ticket. I smiled. I wanted a ticket.

Pretty soon we heard the familiar wail of a traffic cop's siren and I pulled over to the side of the road. I didn't give the cop any argument. He was a pretty nice guy. I know I was doing over seventy but he put it down on the ticket at fifty. I didn't care. Now I had a beautiful alibi. I told the cop that I was on my way to pick up some friends who were coming up to the house for a swim. We kidded back and forth a minute or so.

I drove Vivian a bit farther. We talked mostly about Connie. I asked her for more details about this fainting spell. She said she'd heard Connie calling the doctor and she kept on telling me not to worry. It was 11:15 by my wrist watch when I dropped Vivian. I turned the car around and drove back to the house. It took me exactly twelve minutes. I remember that it was 11:27 when I pulled the car into the garage.

I found Connie back on the patio still sunning herself. She asked about Maureen and the McAlisters. I told her that I phoned them from a drug-

store on the way and that they might be up later in the afternoon.

I said that I was going down to the pool for a swim and Connie jumped up and said she'd come with me. We used to horse around a lot in the pool together and she always enjoyed it. I took off my watch, put it in my pocket, then peeled off slacks and shirt and dived in. Connie went into the bathhouse and changed from her playsuit into a swim suit. It was a bright yellow thing, one of several she kept hanging there.

Connie was a pretty good swimmer. She always used to ask me to stand in the shallow end with my legs apart and then she would dive in and swim under me. Ever since the plan formed in my mind I'd been figuring that she would suggest this now, and she did. I let her swim under my legs maybe three or four times. Each time I moved a little nearer to the edge. I had to have something against which to brace myself.

I think it was the fourth time when I put the plan into execution. As she was swimming under water between my legs I put my foot on the back of her neck and held her under water against the tile bottom of the pool. I had figured it well—by shifting only slightly I was able to put both feet across her neck and shoulders, and I could bear down firmly, getting leverage from the rail around the pool. Really nothing to it. I remember thinking it was too simple. I felt no emotion at all, no guilt, no horror, no excitement, no remorse. I was doing a job I'd

planned, and doing it efficiently.

Her arms were spread-eagled on the bottom of the pool and I was able to exert enough pressure to prevent her from reaching her arms up. She couldn't move. She was pinned down there, firmly. Her face was pressed against the bottom of the pool and the only sound you could hear was the bubbles coming up. For a few moments her legs were thrashing around but pretty soon they became lifeless. Maybe she fainted again. I don't know. I hope so. I remember hoping that she wasn't suffering. I knew she must be, but I hoped she wasn't. She looked very tiny in her yellow swimming suit.

The bubbles kept rising for a long time. It may have been five minutes. I don't know. I remember thinking that I'd have to be very careful not to apply too much pressure. I didn't want any bruises or marks on her. Connie always bruised easily. She had a lovely skin.

Finally, maybe a minute after the last bubble came up, I took one foot off her neck and then the other. I wasn't sure what was going to happen. I didn't know if the body would stay under water or float to the top. I was perfectly calm. I climbed out of the pool. She looked like a small yellow flower lying there under the water. I waited to see what would happen. Nothing happened. Her body remained lying on the bottom of the pool, absolutely motionless.

I picked up slacks, shirt, shoes and socks and went into the bathhouse. I was perfectly calm. I took a shower and dressed.

When I came out Connie's body still hugged the bottom of the pool. I looked at my wrist watch. It was exactly 11:45. I took out my wallet and looked at the ticket the speed cop had given me. He had written down the time, 11:05. Not a perfect alibi, of course. But plausible.

WE LIVE on a winding street where there are few houses, and these set well back. I had noticed very carefully, riding back, that no pedestrians had seen me return. I got into the Cadillac again and drove away. There was no traffic and I'm sure that not a soul saw me. I knew I was safe. I tore down the boulevard and turned west. During the actual killing I'd been perfectly calm. Now, when I thought I'd gotten away with it, I was beginning to get the shakes. Driving out towards the ocean along Sunset, I needed a drink in the worst way but was afraid to stop anywhere. I didn't want any bartender to remember afterwards that I had come in for a brandy. I didn't want to take any chances.

I drove as quickly as I thought safe and I forced myself to calm down. Pretty soon I was okay again.

I remember quite distinctly figuring up just how I stood at that moment. It looked solid. Not only Vivian but the doctor knew that Connie was subject to these fainting spells. When they found her body in the pool they'd naturally assume she had passed out again and had drowned. The servants were all out and there wasn't anyone else even within shouting distance.

I remember figuring that in all these cases they nearly always suspect the husband but that didn't worry me. I had an alibi—from the police department itself. I was ten miles away from our home, still heading away from home, only forty minutes before she was drowned. Both the speed cop and Vivian knew from me that I was on my way to round up Maureen and the McAlisters. If necessary they'd testify to this effect.

I wasn't worried either that the police or the D. A.'s office could dig up any motive. Everyone knew that Connie and I got along fine. Vivian would testify that I really was very much concerned when she mentioned about the fainting. The McAlisters live in Westwood. I planned to stop by their house first and then pick up Maureen later, but this wasn't necessary. I found Maureen with them. She had phoned and told them her car was on the blink and Bert McAlister had picked her up. I told them all that Connie was waiting up at the house, and would they like to come up for a swim? The McAlisters don't have a pool and they were all for it. I stayed there for maybe ten minutes and had a drink.

We left in the two cars. Maureen said she had nothing to do all day and figured she might stay and have dinner with us. The McAlisters had a date later on. Maureen got into my car and the McAlisters followed us.

Maureen asked me how Connie felt and I said fine. Maureen said, "The reason I ask is because I called

her the other day and she told me that she just had passed out or something."

I told Maureen it was nothing, or at least that Connie had said it was nothing. I was very casual about it. I was glad she had mentioned it, though. It strengthened my case. Now Maureen, and possibly others, knew about Connie's fainting spells.

I steered my car into the garage, next to Connie's Lincoln convertible. The McAlisters parked in front of the house. We went in through a side door that leads directly onto the patio.

They came onto the patio behind me and when they saw that Connie wasn't there Doris McAlister looked up at the window of Connie's bedroom and yelled, "Hey, Connie, come on down; we're here."

Bert said he'd welcome a drink and Maureen, who likes her liquor, said she'd take one also. I told them that I'd have to be bartender since the help were all out, and I went into the kitchen.

When I came back with the drinks Doris was just coming out through the French windows from the living room. She said, "Connie isn't in the house. I just went up to her room."

Bert, who was lying on a chaise-longue smoking a cigarette, suggested that maybe Connie had gone out somewhere.

Maureen said, "Not unless someone picked her up. I saw her car in the garage."

It was Maureen who suggested that maybe Connie had gone down to the pool. Somehow I had figured

all along that she would think of that—I don't know why.

Bert grinned and said, "Maybe she's swimming in the nude—let's go and surprise her." They knew that we went into the pool without swimming suits. It was that secluded.

We sat around for a few minutes and finished our drinks. It was all very casual and leisurely. Nobody was at all concerned about Connie's absence.

I was busy figuring out the next step. I pretended to be busy over the tray of drinks but I was figuring everything very carefully. I decided to let the others go ahead and find her body first. I was going to bring up in the rear carrying a big tray of drinks and when I heard the first cry I would drop the tray with a loud crash. I'd figured out even details like that.

While I was still stalling over the tray Maureen nudged me and pointed. She said, "Look, Alan—there's a rainbow from the spray."

I can't think how I had failed to notice it before. The sprinklers were on now. *But they had not been on when I'd left!* Or so it seemed to me. I was positive that the sprinklers had not been on; and yet, could I be absolutely sure? I tried desperately to recall every move I had made after climbing out of the pool. Every detail was vivid in my mind, but I couldn't remember the sprinklers.

My heart began pounding my ribs again. I wondered if the gardener could possibly have been there. I knew he never came on Saturdays. I couldn't figure it out. I think I

must have hypnotized myself into believing that I myself must have turned them on before I'd left. I stopped being panicky. I was calm again. I looked at the rainbow in the spray, and I remember thinking it was pretty.

Finally Maureen said, "It's so damn hot up here—let's go down to the pool."

She led the way. The McAlisters followed. I said, "Go on ahead—I'll have to get this tray ready."

I remember distinctly that my voice sounded perfectly calm and normal.

I let them get well ahead of me and then followed, keeping my eyes on the tray.

I was holding my breath waiting for the first horrified shriek. I heard Doris say cheerfully, "You know, this is the nicest pool in Beverly Hills."

I stood there shaking, and the glasses on the tray danced insanely. I figured that maybe they hadn't looked into the pool, but that didn't seem reasonable because it's not a big pool anyway and the water is always as clear as crystal.

I heard the noisy creaking of the glider as someone sat down on it. I couldn't stand it any longer. My knees were like water but I somehow managed to walk up to the others.

Maureen was swinging gently in the glider. Bert and Doris were sitting on chairs by the edge of the pool. There was no sign of Connie's body. The sun was beating down and there wasn't even a wet mark

around the edge of the pool. It had disappeared.

I set the heavy tray down on the table and I stared at the pool. I had never been so frightened or horrified in my life.

MAUREEN and the others after a moment or two went into the bathhouses to change. For what seemed like hours, but probably was only a minute or two, I couldn't think of anything. I just stared at the pool—stared at the spot where I had drowned Connie. I was in a sweat and I shook all over.

Then suddenly I linked it up. The sprinklers! Pancho *must* have come after I'd gone. He comes twice a week and he had been there the day before. I had taken that fact into consideration. He wasn't due for another three days and yet I realized that for some technical gardening reason he must have come to turn on the sprinklers and found her body in the pool. I cursed Pancho's eternal soul.

I became very calm again. This hadn't really killed my plan. I would merely have to change it a bit. I remember saying this to myself: *You know nothing about it—you don't know anything. You left her on the patio, that's all you know—You've no idea that she's dead—You've no idea how she met her death—you know nothing.*

Doris, Bert and Maureen came out of the bathhouses in a bunch and dived into the pool together. They splashed around and laughed. I sat down on a chair near the table.

Maureen swam over to me. She said, "Come on, slowpoke, get into your trunks."

My voice sounded normal. I said I didn't think I'd swim. Maureen said, "Oh, come on. I'll kiss you under water like they do in those swim suit advertisements."

I couldn't bear the thought of getting into the pool. I said I'd fix drinks for them and go in later.

Doris said, "What's the matter—don't you feel well?"

Bert told Maureen that he'd like to try that kissing under water and they went at it. Bubbles came up. I felt sick. I remember thinking that bubbles from kissing shouldn't look like bubbles from dying.

Doris suggested that I might phone a few people to try to locate Connie. She was convinced that somebody had come by and picked her up in their car.

We have a telephone extension down at the bathhouse. I called up a few of our friends and asked if they had seen Connie by any chance. When the others happened to be near they listened to the conversation and once or twice someone took the phone out of my hand and talked to these friends. It was all very casual. Nobody was concerned. They all figured that Connie would blow in any minute.

The McAlisters stayed well over an hour. They had a few more drinks, then told me to say hello to Connie for them and went to keep their date.

I walked back to the house to see them into their car and Maureen in

her wet suit tagged along. She said she was going into the pool again. I didn't want her to stay but there was nothing I could do about it.

After they had gone Maureen and I remained on the patio. I looked at my watch. It was a few minutes before three. I knew that it couldn't be very long before the phone or doorbell would ring and I would have to answer a lot of questions. I was still quite calm. I figured I could still get away with it if I just remembered that I knew absolutely nothing about anything. I was quite ready for almost every question.

I sat in a comfortable chair and Maureen stretched herself out on the hot tiles at my feet and sunned herself. Once she raised her head lazily, pursed up her lips and blew me a kiss. It was exactly what Connie had done a few hours earlier. I lit a cigarette and told Maureen to cut it out. She looked rather startled.

While I was in the kitchen getting some White Rock I heard a car pull up and a moment later the front doorbell rang. I knew instinctively that this was it. I finished fixing a highball for myself and I went to the front door holding the glass in one hand. I had myself under good control. My hand wasn't shaking in the least. I remember looking at my hand, and feeling very pleased that it was so steady.

A DAPPER little man with a neat brown mustache was standing on the threshold. He wore a light Palm Beach suit and a Panama hat. He didn't look like a cop but I knew

that he must be. He said, "Are you Alan Blake?" and he started groping in his hip pocket for a wallet. I said, "Yes, I'm Blake." I let him stand on the threshold. I didn't ask him in. I pretended I had no idea who he was or what he might want. I was going to let him carry the ball. I was polite but rather cool. I think I put on a pretty good act.

He showed me a badge and said, "I'm Mowbray of the Homicide Squad." I still stood at the door, holding my drink, and I made no move to invite him in. I said, "Yes?" and I remember thinking that I got just the right inflection of puzzled surprise into the query.

Mowbray has large, brown, friendly and even kindly eyes. He never took them off me for an instant. I looked at him quite steadily. He has a pleasant voice too. Low-pitched, and well educated. I don't remember his exact words but finally he said something to the effect that he had bad news for me and that it was about my wife, and might he come in.

I yelled, "My wife—what do you mean—what happened?" and led him into the living room. In a friendly way he suggested that maybe I had better sit down. I sat on the piano bench.

Mowbray circled the living room once, slowly. I think he noticed everything. He looked down at the stain where Connie had dropped the coffee and then he looked out on the patio and saw Maureen there. He closed the French windows. Then he walked over to the piano and

from the breast pocket of his coat took a small notebook. A frayed old notebook, held together by red rubber bands. There was a stub of pencil stuck under the bands. He looked at me steadily and, it seemed to me, rather sympathetically. Finally I said, "What *about* my wife; what happened? I came back about an hour-and-a-half ago and she'd gone out—what happened?"

He said, very quietly, "Mr. Blake, your wife is dead. We have her down at the morgue."

While I was fixing the drink for myself in the kitchen just before Mowbray came I had already anticipated this moment. I did now just what I planned to do. I jumped up and stared at him in horror. I yelled, "Dead! My God, what do you mean—what happened?"

I must have yelled pretty loud. Maureen opened the French windows, pushed into the room. She said, "Alan, what's wrong?"

I remember wishing to heaven that she hadn't come up to the house in the first place. She'd been lying out in the patio sunning herself, and she'd lowered the straps of her swimming suit off her shoulders, and now when she barged in she hadn't bothered to raise them. I remember thinking that she looked too damn pretty. I remember thinking that she looked like a good motive for a murder. I remember wondering whether I had really murdered Connie so that I could have Maureen. I said, "This man is from the Homicide Bureau. It's about Connie. Something's happened. She's dead."

Maureen sat down slowly on the arm of a chair. She started to cry. She said, "Oh, no—no!" She looked at me. Her eyes were full of terror. Maybe she guessed what had happened. I don't know.

I told Mowbray who Maureen was and he asked me quietly to take her out of the room. I did what he told me.

As soon as I came back he started asking me questions. He said they were just routine questions always asked in these cases and his manner was still friendly and sympathetic.

I don't think I was really nervous. I kept on repeating to myself: "*You know nothing . . . you're innocent . . . you know absolutely nothing.*"

I kept on saying, "My God—what happened? How did it happen?" but Mowbray always managed to avoid a direct answer. I didn't know whether to ask him specifically how Connie had died or to wait until he told me. I wondered what an innocent man would have done, but I couldn't be sure. I was getting jumpy and confused.

Finally Mowbray opened the notebook and started asking real questions. He asked me when was the last time I saw Connie alive. I had the answer to that all pat. I told him that I drove the maid into Hollywood and that it must have been about ten minutes of eleven when I left. He wrote that down and he asked me if I could be sure of the time.

I said, "Yes, I can, more or less. It so happens I got a ticket for speeding about fifteen minutes later."

I pulled out my wallet and showed him the ticket. I said, "You'll see that the time is written on there and also where I was when the cop had me pull over."

He studied the ticket carefully and made notes. I wanted to bite out my tongue. I realized immediately that I had been much too eager and glib about offering this alibi. From then on I answered his questions far more carefully. I was purposely vague. I figured that an innocent man would be terribly confused.

Mowbray quietly asked where I had gone after getting the ticket. I told him that I dropped Vivian somewhere in Hollywood. I said I couldn't remember exactly what corner but that Vivian might. I explained that Connie had given her the day off and that she wouldn't be back until late that night.

Mowbray said, "And where did you go after that, Mr. Blake?"

I told him that my wife had wanted me to pick up some friends to come and swim. I told him I couldn't remember exactly what time it was when I got to the McAlisters. I explained that they had left just a little while ago and that Maureen had decided to stick around and wait for Connie. I gave him the names of some of the people I called when I was pretending to check on where Connie might be. He asked for the telephone numbers and I gave him one or two. I said I couldn't remember the others. I said I was too upset.

He wrote it all down in his little book.

I guess I must have been staring

at the coffee stain because I remember he asked me about that. I told him Connie had spilled a cup of coffee a few days ago. I didn't know whether to say anything about her fainting. I decided not to. If it came up later I could tell all about it. I could say that I was too upset to remember at the time.

Mowbray said, "Mr. Blake, when you left this morning at ten minutes of eleven, where was your wife?" I told him she said she was going back to the patio to finish breakfast. He asked if I could remember what she was wearing. I described Connie's pink playsuit. I told him I remembered it so vividly because it had irritated me. He wrote it down.

He kept on asking questions. I didn't like the sound of it. He wanted to know did we get along all right, had we had a fight recently; things like that. He was no longer quite as friendly and compassionate as he had been. I was beginning to get rattled. Suddenly I couldn't take it any more.

I said, "Look, what are you driving at? Why are you asking me all these questions?"

He flipped over a new page in his notebook and sucked his stub of pencil. He said, "Just routine, Mr. Blake. I realize they must be harrowing." He was quite apologetic.

He asked me Connie's age. I told him I thought she was forty, but I couldn't be quite sure; I'd never seen her birth certificate. He asked my age and when I told him he raised his eyebrows and said, "That's very interesting."

And immediately he started asking questions about Maureen; how old was she; did she come to the house often; where did she live, and so on. He asked was she my friend or Connie's? How long had we known her? I can't remember all the questions. He had already asked me what time it was when I got back to the house with the McAlisters and Maureen. Now he suddenly said, "Between the time you left the house this morning and *that* time, Mr. Blake, did you by any chance come back to the house for any reason?"

I was prepared for that one. I said, "No, of course not."

"You were pretty slow getting to your friends and bringing them back here."

I explained that, having just caught one ticket for speeding, I'd wanted to avoid getting another. He made a note of it all. I remember distinctly that from this point on I was getting more and more rattled. I was annoyed with myself because I hadn't stopped in somewhere on the way to the beach for a cup of coffee or even a drink. It would have been a good alibi. I could sense that Mowbray rather doubted my story. Over and over he asked me to repeat what time I left the house.

Finally I yelled at him, "Look—for God's sake—instead of rehashing all this stuff why won't you tell me what happened! How did she die? You haven't even told me *that* yet!"

He said, "Of course, Mr. Blake. I'm sorry. Death was by drowning. Mrs. Blake's body was found in the swimming pool by your gardener.

He notified the police. We're holding him for further questioning."

MY HEART pounded in my ears and in my throat. At last it was out in the open. I didn't have to pretend not to know. I said, "My God—it's impossible. She was a good swimmer."

He made a note of that. He asked if she were a good diver. I said she was pretty good.

He started asking me questions about Pancho, the gardener. He wanted to know how long Pancho had worked for us, whether we considered him trustworthy, stuff like that. I got the definite idea he thought Pancho might have had something to do with it. I asked what time Pancho had found Connie in the pool. Mowbray looked in his notebook and told me they weren't sure. He said: "The man has no watch and says he didn't know the exact time."

My heart was still pounding. I figured the cops suspected something wasn't quite kosher and might try to hang it on Pancho. I told Mowbray that I was surprised to hear Pancho had been at the house. I explained that he'd been here yesterday and wasn't due to come again until Monday. I felt like a heel, but hell, it was Pancho or me. Mowbray wrote it all down. He seemed to be eating it up.

I felt it reasonably safe now to ask for more details. Mowbray was quite willing to give them. He moistened his thumb and flipped back a number of pages in his notebook. In a dull, droning voice he read a ram-

bling statement that Pancho had made. He told me they had questioned the man pretty thoroughly. He said Pancho had told them he was once in jail. I never knew that. I doubt if Connie knew it. I remember him reading this: "Question: Have you ever heard Mr. and Mrs. Blake quarreling? Answer: Sure—they fight once in a while. Nothing bad." I was furious. I told Mowbray it was a damned lie, which it was. We had never quarreled, not once.

Here Mowbray interrupted suddenly to ask me if we'd ever had any trouble with Pancho. I remembered that Connie had bawled him out once about some camellia bushes that died. It made Pancho sore and he hadn't come back to work for a week. I told Mowbray about it. He wrote it down. He asked me if Pancho had ever tried to get fresh with Connie or with Vivian. I didn't answer immediately. Then I said that I'd never actually noticed anything specific. Mowbray asked me what I meant by that. I said I didn't like the way Pancho used to look at Connie sometimes. I said it might have been my imagination. I'd never spoken about it.

Mowbray went back to his book and started reading from Pancho's questioning. I was feeling better all the time. I was still elated by the knowledge that Pancho had been in jail, and that the cops knew about it. It seemed like a break for me.

I remember Mowbray reading this: "Question: When you saw the body

of Mrs. Blake in the pool what did you do? Answer: I pulled her out. She was in the shallow end. Question: Then what did you do? Answer: I put a big towel over her. She had nothing on."

I said, "He's a liar. She had on a yellow suit." Then I bit my tongue so hard that I've been tasting blood ever since. I stared at Mowbray, who glanced up from his notebook and looked at me for a long time. Very quietly he said, "You interrupted me, Mr. Blake." He turned back to his notebook and went on reading. He read, "Question: You mean that she was naked? Answer: No, I didn't mean that. She had on a little yellow swimming suit which was practically nothing."

Mowbray closed his notebook and snapped the rubber bands around it. He said, very quietly, "Mr. Blake, you told us a couple of times that when you last saw your wife she was wearing a pink playsuit. How did you know she died in a yellow suit?"

That was a question I couldn't answer. I couldn't think. I heard nothing but the pounding of my heart. I remember feeling horribly embarrassed. Fear came later, and horror and remorse. Right then all I could feel was a sickening sense of shame at my stupidity for jumping the gun.

Now he had asked the jackpot question and I had no answer prepared for *that*. I couldn't speak. I could only taste the blood in my mouth.