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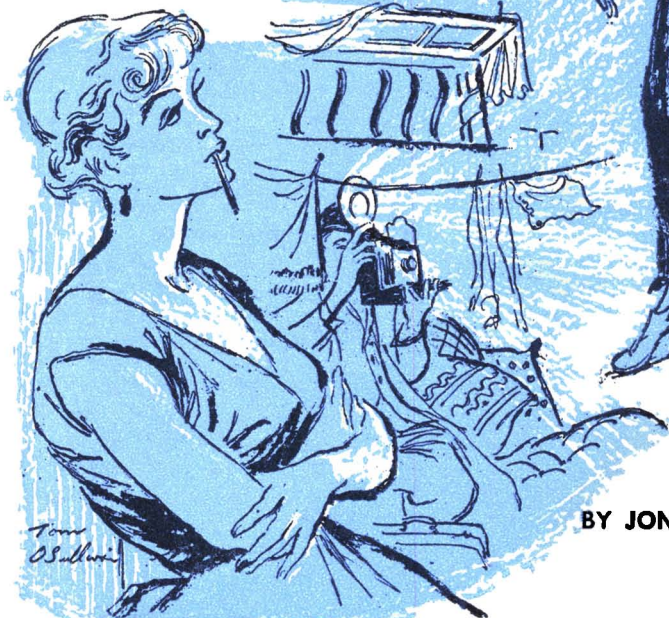
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The Purple Collar



A Novelette

BY JONATHAN CRAIG

"I just walked in the door," she told the police, "and there was this man hanging from the ceiling. I'd never seen him before in my life."

THERE'D been a stab-and-assault in the Eighteenth's bailiwick the night before, and all leaves and days off had been cancelled until we caught the guy. My partner, Ben Muller, and I had been scheduled for relief at eight A.M., but

at a quarter past four that afternoon we were still checking out leads. It's all in the day's work, of course, but there are some crimes you just naturally take more interest in than others; and when the stab-and-assault victim happens

to be only nine years old, you don't mind the extra hours and loss of sleep at all.

But at a quarter past four, Control gave the signals and coding that meant the killer had been apprehended, and that all off-duty detective teams should report back to their precincts.

Ben, who was driving our RMP car, sighed and turned onto Broadway, heading back uptown to the Eighteenth.

"I'd a little rather we'd grabbed the guy ourselves," he said. "But now that he's nailed, I got no thoughts but bed. A cold shower, and then ten straight hours of sack-time."

I felt pretty much the same way, and started to say so, when the dash speaker rattled and Control broke in again. This time the lady dispatcher's voice sounded a little sorry for us. The gist of the call was that a suicide had been phoned in from an apartment house at 905 West Fifty-third Street. The assistant M.E. and the tech crew were already there, but the detective team which would normally have handled the squeal was the same team which had just trapped the killer on a roof top. That meant they'd be tied up with him for many hours, and it was up to Ben and me to fill in for them.

Ben touched the siren just enough to get us through the next intersection and fed the RMP a little more gas.

"You and I made a mistake when we signed up with this outfit, Pete," he said. "We should have taken the examination for fireman, like sensible men."

I grinned. "Sometimes I think you're right," I said.

He turned west on Fifty-third. "The job keeps you young, though," he said. "I will say that for it."

"Maybe it's just that cops don't live so long," I said. "You ever think of it that way?"

"All the time, Pete. That's another reason I wish I'd taken the exam for fireman."

"You're too fat for a fireman. You'd never get up the ladder."

"Who's worried about ladders? I'd stand around and give orders, and let skinny guys like you fool with the ladders."

"Sure," I said. "Pull up, Ben. That's nine-oh-five, there on the corner."

2.

It was a converted brownstone, like a lot of others in the neighborhood. All New York brownstones look pretty much the same from the outside, but inside, they range all the way from Bohemian pigpens to millionaires' showplaces.

This was one of the pigpens.

The dead man was in the basement apartment, suspended from a water pipe near the ceiling by a double thickness of dirty cotton clothesline. The apartment itself

was something to see. There were two filthy mattresses side by side in one corner, newspapers spread on the cement floor in lieu of a carpet, an exposed toilet and sink in one corner, with an overflowing garbage pail between them, and pornographic drawings on the grimy stucco walls. There were scraps of food and cigarette butts everywhere, and a large cardboard box near the door seemed to be completely filled with empty liquor bottles and beer cans. It was a tossup as to whether the place looked worse than it smelled, or vice versa.

The tech crew was going about its business with even greater speed than usual, and the expressions on the men's faces showed that the sooner they finished the better they'd like it.

Bill Marcy, the beat cop who'd been waiting for us at the street door, nodded toward a woman who stood leaning up against the far wall.

"Her name's Janice Pedrick," Bill said. "She goes with this dump."

"She the one who called you?" Ben asked.

"Yeah."

The woman was smoking a cigarette, watching us sullenly. She was very tall, close to six feet, I'd say and somewhere between thirty and thirty-five. She had short blonde hair, dark at the roots, and while she wasn't especially pretty, her figure made up for it.

"Who found him, Bill?" I asked.

"She did."

The woman dropped her cigarette to the floor, left it smoldering there, and turned to watch the photographer adjust his camera for another shot.

Les Wilbur, the assistant M.E., nodded to Ben and me and motioned us over to the man hanging from the water pipe.

"I remembered the blasting you boys gave me last time I cut down a DOA, Pete," he said wryly. "This time, I left the guy hanging for you."

I nodded. "It's usually best, Les." I stepped close to the corpse. His feet cleared the floor by only a few inches, but I could still look down slightly when I looked at his face. He had been in his early forties, I guessed, a very small man who couldn't have weighed more than a hundred and ten or fifteen pounds. His sport shirt and slacks were expensive-looking, and his shoes obviously had been made by hand. His nose was badly flattened and there was a heavy tracery of scar tissue around both eyebrows.

"A fighter," Ben said. "Most likely a pro. You sure as hell'd have a hard time getting that marked up, just mixing it in back alleys."

I glanced at the doctor. "How long would you say he's been strung up here, Les?"

He pursed his lips thoughtfully. "Call it six to eight hours."

"That's a lot better than M.E.'s usually do," I said.

He smiled. "Well, this one's pretty easy, Pete. Rigor mortis usually begins within three to five hours, starting in the jaws, and takes anywhere from eight to twelve hours to become complete. In this case, the RM has progressed only to the hips. That would put the time of death at from six to eight hours ago."

I glanced at my watch. "That would mean he suicided between ten-thirty and twelve-thirty."

"Okay to take this guy down now, Pete?" Ben asked.

I looked over at the photographer. "You finished?"

He nodded, and I pulled a straight chair over to a position beneath the body, climbed up, and untied the clothesline from the pipe. I carried the body to one of the mattresses on the floor, put it down, and then untied the noose from the man's neck. I paid particular attention to the way the rope fibers had been scuffed. If they had been scuffed toward the body, I would have known that someone had thrown the rope over the pipe and dragged the body up — which would have meant our suicide wouldn't have been a suicide at all.

But, although there was nothing suspicious about the rope fibers, there was something else very wrong. I noticed it the instant I bent down to look closely at the dead man's neck.

The rope had left a deep, purple collar around his neck, and if he had died from the rope there would have been small black-and-blue marks around the collar's lower edge. Such marks are caused by the bursting of tiny blood vessels.

There were no such marks — and that meant our man had not been alive when he was hanged. It meant we had a murder on our hands.

Les Wilbur noticed the absence of black-and-blue marks at the same moment I did. "Looks like you boys are in for more than you bargained for," he said.

Ben stood frowning at the dead man a moment, and then he glanced over toward the woman. "Let's get started, Pete," he said.

3.

We walked over to the woman. She had lighted another cigarette. She left it dangling from the side of her mouth as she crossed her arms across her chest and stared at us.

"You Miss Pedrick?" I asked.

She let a little smoke trickle from her nose. "That's right."

"This your apartment?"

"If you want to call it that."

"Who's the dead man?"

She shrugged. "I don't know."

"A man's found hanged in your own apartment, and you don't know who he is?"

"That's what I said. You hear pretty well — for a cop."

"When did you find him?"

"Why, the minute I got home. When'd you think?"

"How long ago was that?"

"Just a couple seconds before I went out after that cop over there. About an hour ago, I guess. I don't have a phone, so I had to go out after a cop."

"And you haven't any idea who the man is?"

"I told you I didn't. I don't know him from Adam."

"How long had you been out of your apartment?"

"Since last night."

"About what time?"

"Oh, about nine o'clock, I guess. Somewhere around there. Better say nine-thirty."

"You keep your door locked, don't you?"

"Sure. But it's a cheap spring lock. Anybody could open it."

"Is that the way you figure it?" I asked. "I mean, that he broke in and —"

"Look mister," she said. "I don't figure anything. All I know is that he got in here somehow and knocked himself off. I don't try to figure any further than that, because I don't *have* to. I haven't been here since last night, and I can prove it. I never saw the guy before, and you can't prove I did. Maybe he broke in to see what he could steal, and then all at once he decided to hang himself. How should I know what happened? And who cares, anyhow?"

I turned to Ben. "See if you can

find any identification on him," I said. "And then look up a phone and tell them what we've got here."

He nodded and walked back toward the corpse.

I studied the woman's face a moment. She'd lived a lot of years the hard way, I could tell. It was all there in her face. And it was there in her voice too, if you listened for it. Just as the indications of lying were there. Even the best confidence men in the country are troubled with a dry throat when they lie, though they're usually very skillful at covering it up. Mrs. Pedrick wasn't skillful at all. Her voice had grown increasingly husky, and she was swallowing a lot more than was normal.

"Why don't you start telling the truth?" I asked.

"Listen, you! I —"

"Just take it easy," I said. "In the first place, I'm tired of listening to nothing. And in the second place, this isn't suicide. It's murder."

She took a half step back from me, and one hand darted up to her throat and stayed there. "Murder!" she whispered, and the word had the right ring of astonishment to it.

I nodded. "He was already dead when he was strung up there, Miss Pedrick. Does that give you another slant on things?"

She glanced about her for something to sit on, and finally moved to a stack of newspapers and sat down on that. "Lord," she said.

"You still claim you don't know him?" I asked.

She took a long time to answer. "No," she said at last. "No, I don't know him. I was telling the truth. I never saw him before in my life."

"But you do have a pretty good idea how he got into your apartment, don't you?"

She moistened her lips, glancing along her eyes toward the mattress.

"Well?" I said.

"If — if I tell you, can you keep my name out of it? Can you make it look as if you found out from someone else?"

Before I could answer her, Ben Muller came up. "No luck, Pete," he said. "Somebody clipped his wallet. There isn't even any loose change in his pocket. No tie pin or wristwatch, either. We'll have to get a make on him some other way."

I nodded. "Nose around a little. See if you can find anything."

"Okay. Want me to call the lieutenant first?"

"Yeah, I guess you'd better."

He moved away again and I turned back to Miss Pedrick. "You said you wanted us to keep your name out of it," I said. "Who are you afraid of?"

She got to her feet slowly and stood there a moment while she rubbed the back of her hand across her forehead. "It's so close in here," she said. "Can't we talk outside? I don't want to go out in the street, but there's sort of a little court out back. Can we go out there?"

I nodded, and then followed her through a narrow corridor and out a door into a walled-in area about twelve feet square.

"This is better," she said. "At least we can breathe out here."

"Better start again," I said. "And this time, tell the truth." I gave her a cigarette, lit it for her, and then lit one for myself.

"It's one of Leda's friends," she said. "It has to be. There's no other answer."

"Who's Leda?"

"A girl friend of mine. She — well, she was here last night. She came by the bar where I work and asked me if she could borrow my apartment, and I said all right. She had a date with someone, you see, and she wanted a place where they could be alone."

"When was this?"

"Last night — about eight o'clock."

"All right. Go on."

"Well, it wasn't the first time I'd done that. Leda always gave me ten dollars, so I could get a hotel room and have a few dollars left over. She couldn't go to a hotel room herself, because she was afraid her husband would get wind of it. He has two or three different businesses going for him, and he knows just about everybody. He gets around a lot, and so do his friends. Leda was afraid to take a chance on a hotel or a furnished room."

"But she didn't mention the name of the man she had the date with?"

"No, she didn't. She'd never done that any of the other times, either."

"She borrow your apartment often?"

"I guess you'd call it often. Sometimes she'd ask to use it a couple of times the same week, and then maybe I wouldn't see her for a week or ten days."

"You think it was always the same man, or different men each time?"

"I couldn't say. I never felt like being too inquisitive, if you know what I mean."

"You make a habit of that?"

"Of what?"

"Of loaning your apartment out to your girl friends. At ten dollars a night, and with a hotel room costing you only three or four, that could turn into a pretty profitable sideline."

Her eyes moved away from mine. "You'd find out anyhow, wouldn't you?"

"You know we would."

"Well, what was the harm in it? If I hadn't accommodated them, they'd have gone somewhere else, wouldn't they? Listen. If a woman's going to play around, she's going to play around. It was better they did it in a safe place than —"

"All right," I said wearily. "About this Leda, now. What was the arrangement supposed to be?"

"Why, just the same as it always was. I gave her my key, and told her I wouldn't be home before three or four o'clock this afternoon."

"How'd she get the key back to you?"

"She didn't. Not personally, that is. She always hid it in a crack in the stonework over the basement door. The one that leads up to the street."

"That's pretty high. She a tall girl like you?"

"Yes. She used to work in chorus lines, just like I did."

"You known her long?"

"Yes. A long time. About — oh, about fifteen years."

"And when you came home this afternoon you found the key where you expected it to be?"

"No. It wasn't there. I got a passkey from the landlord."

I took out my notebook. "What's Leda's full name, and where does she live?"

4.

She hesitated. "Listen, officer. . . Isn't there some way you can keep me out of this? I've known Leda half my life. I think the world of her. So long as I thought that man had killed himself, I was willing to bluff through a story to protect her. But if it's murder, I —"

"It isn't Leda you're worried about," I said. "You might as well level with us. You've been around enough to know that the more you cooperate with cops, the easier it'll go." I paused. "All right, so who is it you're afraid of?"

"If you were in my place, you'd

be afraid of him too. He — he used to be a hoodlum. Maybe he still is, for all I know. He's mean — mean all the way through. He beat up one of his best friends once, just because the guy danced with Leda a couple of times too often. Once he knocked a man unconscious, just because he brushed against Leda on the street."

"You still haven't told me who," I said.

"Leda's husband. Eddie Willard."

I wrote the name down. "Where do they live, Eddie and Leda?"

"You haven't promised to —"

"I can't promise anything," I told her. "I'll do what I can for you, yes — but I can't commit the police department that way. You should know that."

She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "They live at the Bayless."

"That an apartment house or a hotel?"

"Hotel. It's at the corner of West End Avenue and Sixty-second Street."

I made a note of it. "What hotel did you stay in last night?" I asked.

"The Paragon, on West Fifty-fourth."

"I know where it is. It's just down the street from the station house. What time did you leave there?"

"Well, their check-out time's a little earlier than it is most places. At one o'clock. I — let's see — I guess I checked out about noon."

"And then what did you do?"

"I took a walk."

"Where?"

"Oh, just around. I walked over to Fifth Avenue, and up Fifth to Central Park. I went to the zoo, and watched people rowing boats on the lake a while, and then I sat down on a bench and tried to get a little sun."

"You walk home from Central Park?"

"Yes. Why?"

"You see anyone you knew?"

"On my walk? No." Her eyes suddenly grew round. "You don't think I . . . ?"

"I have to ask questions," I said. "Then I have to check them out." I took a final drag on my cigarette and flipped it away. For some reason I kept thinking about those filthy mattresses back inside. A cop sometimes turns up a lot of muck in the course of an investigation, and sometimes the stench of the muck stays with you far longer than the memory of the investigation. I had a feeling I'd be recalling those sweat-soured mattresses for a lot of years to come.

Janice Pedrick shifted her position slightly, and as she did so I noticed the play of muscles through the hard, dancer's body. She was a large girl, and a strong one. She would be physically capable of handling a small man the size of the corpse. She would have had no trouble at all stringing him up. On the other hand, the dead man had apparently been a prizefighter, supposedly ca-

pable of taking care of himself. And the girl showed no signs of having been in anything like a fight. There were no bruises or scratches, and none of her fingernails had been broken. If she'd been a party to his murder, I reasoned, she had either caught him while he was drunk or drugged — which would come out at the autopsy — or she had had help.

But there was the factor of her alibi — if it was one. I'd heard at least a hundred different suspects tell me the same tale. That walk through Central Park, with stop-offs at the zoo and lake and park bench, had worn pretty thin over the years.

Ben Muller came through the door, carrying a pink petticoat. "Take a look at this, Pete," he said.

The petticoat was of nylon, with about six inches of lace at the bottom. It seemed to be new, but there were two large rents in the lace, and the nylon itself bore at least a dozen creases that extended almost the entire length of the garment. When I held it loosely across my forearm, the petticoat bunched itself together from top to bottom.

I glanced at Janice Pedrick. "This yours?"

She nodded.

"You wad it up like this?"

"No. It — it was hanging over the back of a chair when I left the apartment."

"Looks like we might have something," Ben said.

The girl frowned at the petticoat, and then at Ben. "What do you mean?"

"It could have been used as a garrote." Ben told her. "If someone grabbed it by each end, and pulled it taut, it would stretch out into a kind of rope. If you looped it around someone's neck, and tightened it up, and kept it there long to cause asphyxia, it would leave lengthwise pleats in the material — just like the ones it has in it now."

I handed the petticoat back to Ben. "Hang on to this," I said. "Maybe we can book it as evidence, if things fall that way. How's the doc making out?"

"He said he couldn't do anything more until he got the guy to Bellevue. I told him he could take the body. Okay?"

"Sure. You get a receipt for it?"

"Yeah." He took out a handkerchief and sponged at the back of his neck. "Hot in there, and the stink would make a goat sick."

I turned back to Janice Pedrick. "This friend of yours — this Leda Willard — do you think she'd be home now?"

She looked at her watch. "I don't think so. She goes to work at five."

"Where?"

"She works in a jewelry shop, down in the Village. It's not a regular store. The man she works for makes all his own things. It's just a tiny little place. He's been teaching Leda to make jewelry. She

always liked doing things like that.”

“How come she goes to work at five?”

“The store stays open until midnight. Leda just has a part-time job, and the only reason she works at all is because she wants to learn enough to start her own shop someday.”

“What’s the name of this guy she works for?”

She gave me the name — Carl Dannion — and an address on Christopher Street.

I put the notebook back in my pocket and gestured for Janice Pedrick to step back inside.

“That reminds me,” she said. “I’ll have to be leaving for work myself pretty soon.”

“Not tonight,” I told her.

“What do you mean?”

“I’m afraid we’ll have to ask you to spend a little time at the station house.”

I had expected something of an explosion. She surprised me. All she did was glare at me a little, and then she shrugged and walked past Ben and me and into the apartment.

“You’d better call for a car, Ben,” I said. “Turn her over to a matron, and let her think about things a while. Maybe a couple of hours down there will make her feel more talkative.”

“You don’t want me to question her?”

“No. Just let her stew a bit.”

“And then what?”

“Get a set of the dead guy’s

prints and take them down to BCI. See if they can give us a make on him. While they’re checking, look up the tailor that made his slacks and the guy who made his shoes. Either one of them could probably give you a fast make — provided you can get hold of them.”

We stepped into the apartment. Janice Pedrick was combing her hair before a yellowed mirror over the sink.

“Where’ll you be, in case I want to contact you?” Ben asked.

“I’m going down to the Village.”

“Hell, I figured that much. I mean afterwards.”

“I’ll check in at the station house as soon as I can. You do the same.”

“All right.”

“How do you feel?”

“Sleepy.”

“Yeah. Same here.” I walked to the front door, then turned. “Just lock the place up when the tech boys finish,” I said. “I don’t think we need to leave a stakeout.”

He nodded and crossed over toward Janice Pedrick.

5.

It was a little cooler in the Village, and much quieter. I went down four shallow steps and turned into the Dannion Custom Jewelry Shop. Janice Pedrick had been right about its being tiny. There was room for a very small showcase, a workbench, and not much else. The man who came up to the counter was in his

late fifties, a very thin, scholarly looking man with pince-nez and a spade beard.

"Is Mrs. Willard here?" I asked.

"No. I'm sorry, but she hasn't come in yet. May I help you?" He had just a trace of accent, but I couldn't identify it.

I took out my wallet and showed him my badge. I couldn't have got much more reaction if I'd showed him a live rattlesnake. His face blanched and his forehead suddenly began to glisten with sweat.

"Are you with the FBI?" he asked.

"You didn't take a very good look at my badge," I said. "No. I'm a city detective."

He seemed to relax a bit, but not too much. "What can I do for you?"

"Do you know where Mrs. Willard is?"

He shook his head.

"She didn't call in to say she'd be late for work?"

"No, sir."

"You know any of her friends?"

"No, I'm afraid I don't."

"You ever see her with a very small man — a guy with a broken nose?"

"No, sir. I've never met any of her friends. I've never seen her with anyone at all."

"Not even her husband?"

"No, sir."

I put my wallet back in my pocket. I was curious about why Dannion had become so upset when he saw my badge, but I had no justification

to question him about it. His personal guilts and fears were his own — unless I discovered later that they were connected in some way with the job I was on.

"I guess that's all, Mr. Dannion," I said. "Thanks very much."

"Is Mrs. Willard all right, sir? If she's in any trouble . . . That is, she's a very fine young woman, and if I can be of any assistance . . ."

"She'd be glad to hear that," I said. "But this is police business, Mr. Dannion. I can't discuss it with you."

I went up the steps and climbed into the RMP car and headed back uptown toward the Bayless Hotel.

6.

At the Bayless, I discovered Leda Willard and her husband had checked out at eleven o'clock that morning. They'd left no forwarding address, but they had left a considerable amount of clothing. The manager had ordered this stored for them, under the assumption that they would contact him later with instructions for forwarding or other disposition.

I got a thorough description of both of them and went back to the station house.

Ben Muller was waiting for me. He'd taken the dead man's prints to BCI, but BCI hadn't been able to match them with any in its files. The man's slacks, it seemed, hadn't been tailor-made after all, which

meant that tracing them would take some time. And the bootmaker who had made his shoes had since closed his shop and gone to Europe.

I sent Ben over to the Paragon Hotel to start checking Janice Pedrick's alibi, and then I called Harry Fisher, a very good friend of mine who had once been a middleweight contender and was now writing a sports column for one of the tabloids. He knew everyone connected with the prizefight game, retired or active. I asked him if he'd go to Bellevue and see if he knew the dead man. He said he would be glad to. I gave him the phone number of the squad room, and asked him to leave a message if he should happen to call while I was out.

Then I got Headquarters on the phone and asked them to put out an alarm for the apprehension of Leda and Eddie Willard, and gave them the descriptions I'd got from the hotel manager. I asked for a run-through of the records to see if they had anything on either Willard or his wife, and then gave them Janice Pedrick's name and description and asked for a run-through on her as well.

I had Headquarters switch me to the police laboratory and asked for a report from the tech crew that had worked the murder apartment with Ben and me. They had found several sets of fairly clear fingerprints, but none of the prints had checked out to prints already on file. They were still working, and would call

me as soon as they came up with anything.

I was reasonably sure the assistant M.E. wouldn't have had time to autopsy the body yet, but I called him anyway. He said that he had not been able to get the autopsy scheduled before ten o'clock the next morning, that he had tried to pull a few wires to get to it before then, but had been unable to work it.

I called the policewoman who had been with Janice Pedrick since her arrival at the station house. The policewoman said Janice had been an easy girl to talk to, but a difficult one to get anything out of. She reminded me she had a reputation for indirect questioning, and that if anyone got anything out of Janice it would be she.

I put the phone down, left a note in the message book to the effect that I would be back in twenty minutes, and went down to a restaurant on Fifty-third Street. I had two roast beef sandwiches and three cups of black coffee, and then went back to the squad room.

There was a note to call Harry Fisher on an extension at Bellevue Hospital. I called, and he told me that our dead man's name was Teddy Connors. He said Connors had been a pretty fair featherweight in the middle 30's, had retired with all his brains and most of his money, and had since taken an occasional flyer as a fight manager and promoter. Harry had seen him around only

now and then in recent years, though he had once been a steady customer of the various bars around Madison Square Garden and St. Nicholas Arena.

I thanked Harry, made a tentative date for lunch the first day both of us had a free hour, and then called BCI back again. I gave them Teddy Connors' name and asked for a run-through.

While I was waiting, I walked to the next room and searched the cards in the Eighteenth's Known Resident Criminal File. These are the cards kept on file in the precinct where the criminal lives, no matter where he was arrested. It has his picture, his record, and the date his parole is up. In the event he was arrested with other individuals, these individuals' names are listed on the back of the card. But there was no card for Teddy Connors.

I'd put off the paper work as long as I could, but now I sat down at a typewriter and filled out a Complaint Report form as thoroughly as I could, at this stage of the investigation, and then did the same with the other routine forms.

When I finished with the forms, I had gone as far as I could go. I had almost dozed off staring at the typewriter, so I went down to the corner and brought back a quart carton of black coffee.

I was sipping at it when Ben Muller came in.

"Any luck?" I asked.

"Maybe she took a walk, maybe

she didn't," he said. "She checked out of the hotel when she said she did, but that's as far as I got." He reached for the coffee and drank steadily until he had finished a good half of it. "You want me to talk to her, Pete?"

"Nope. Let her think a while longer."

He shrugged. "Suits me." He sat down at his desk and put his head down on his arms. "Don't wake me up unless I inherit a million bucks, Pete."

The phone on my desk rang. It was Tom Volz, of the Tenth.

"We got something for you, Pete," he said. "Eddie Willard."

"Where'd you grab him?"

"We didn't. He walked in."

"The hell!"

"Sure did, Pete. About two minutes ago. He says he won't talk to anybody but you. That's fine with us. We got our own troubles."

"We'll be there before you can hang up," I said.

"What's the deal?" Ben asked.

"They've got Eddie Willard, over at the Tenth."

He stood up, yawning widely. "Fine. Maybe we'll get to bed some time this year after all."

7.

The boys at the Tenth gave Eddie Willard and me the rear interrogation room to talk in. Willard had said he wouldn't say a word if anyone else was in the room with us, and

I'd left Ben shooting the breeze with Tom Volz. Neither Willard nor I sat down. He was about my height, but a lot thicker-bodied. He had a lot of dark hair and restless dark eyes that never seemed to blink.

"I'm going to give you this fast and hard and all in one piece," he said. "I've heard of you a lot. I think I'll get a clean shake."

I nodded. "What's on your mind, Mr. Willard?"

"I heard a rumble you were looking for Leda and me. I would have turned in up at your precinct, but I didn't want to take a chance on getting tagged by some other cop before I got there."

"Where's your wife, Mr. Willard?"

"I'll get to that. First I want to tell you that I'm doing this to save my own hide. No other reason. I've done a lot for Leda in my time, and now I'm through." He paused a moment, biting at his lip. "Here it is, the whole thing. I just found out about Leda this morning, see? I've been married to her eight years, but I never knew until this morning just what a rotten woman she really was. The only reason I found out then is because she was scared crazy. She didn't kill Teddy Connors, you understand. But she'd been fooling around with him, over at Janice Pedrick's dump and all."

"Did she have any part in the killing?" I asked.

"Not exactly. Bucky Sullivan killed him. Here's the way it went.

Leda was working for a guy down in the Village, a jeweler. This guy was trying to make time with her, and she kind of led him on because he slipped her a few extra bucks now and then. Anyhow, this guy — Dannon, his name is — had been knocking down on his income tax. Every time someone paid cash for something, he'd stash the money in his safe. God knows how long he'd been putting it away, but one night he got half crooked and told Leda about it. He said there was twenty thousand in the safe — and when she didn't believe him, he showed her."

I lit a cigarette and leaned up against the edge of the table. I didn't say anything.

"Well, Leda had been fooling around a lot with this goddamned Teddy Connors," Willard went on. "Connors had dropped a word now and then that made her think he might be able to do something about that twenty grand. She put it up to him, and sure enough Connors gets Bucky Sullivan, a guy he used to spar with in the old days, and the two of them went over to the jewelry shop and hit it. They got the dough all right, but Connors — he saw a chamois bag in a corner of the safe, and he took that along too, without saying anything to Bucky about it."

"What was in the bag?"

"Sapphires. About a dozen of them. Worth a lot more than diamonds. Anyhow, this jeweler reported the stones missing, and called the

insurance company. But he didn't say anything about the money, because he was afraid to. He got into the country illegally, about fifteen years ago, and he knew that if the feds heard about that twenty grand and started smelling around, he might be deported." He took a deep breath. "Well, the insurance company wasn't getting anywhere. Finally they let it out in the right places that they'd pay a flat four grand for return of the stones, and no questions asked. When Bucky Sullivan got the rumble, he knew what Connors had pulled. It made him sore as hell, to think his old buddy had held out on him, and he went on the prowl."

"And caught up with him at Janice Pedrick's place?" I said.

"That's right. Leda and Connors had been shackled up there all night. This morning, Connors went out for some cigarettes. That's when Bucky saw him. He trailed him back to the apartment. He had a gun, and he forced Connors to let him in with him. He told Connors he'd let him go if Connors gave him the rocks, but Connors couldn't do that."

"Why not?"

"Because Leda had conned him out of them. She'd sold them for peanuts. He was real gone on her, I guess. He was an ugly guy, and no woman had ever given him a tumble before. Anyhow, Bucky went nuts. He hit Connors across the throat with the side of his hand and knocked him out. Then he clipped Leda over

the temple with the butt of his gun. She fell down and made out she was unconscious, but she wasn't. Then Bucky grabbed a rag or something and started choking Connors. He turned his back on Leda a moment, and she saw her chance and jumped up and beat it."

I rubbed my cigarette out in a tray, studying him. "Why'd you and your wife check out of your hotel, Mr. Willard?"

"I must have been a little crazy myself, I guess. Leda — she was almost nuts. She thought sure her part in the jewelry heist would come out, once they really got to checking. She'd done a bit out on the West Coast once, for fingering another guy to a burglar — and that's something else I didn't know till this morning. And she said it'd be her word against Bucky's, and that she might end up in the death house with him. Anyhow, I couldn't think straight, right at first. All I could think about was trying to help her get away. And then all at once it hit me, what a goddamned fool I'd been all these years. And all of a sudden I knew I wasn't going to be a nanny for her any more. I'd had a gut full of her. It was like I was seeing her for the first time since I'd known her."

"If she's earned a fall, then she's going to take it alone — is that what you mean?"

"You're damned right. I've been a chump long enough. From now on, she's on her own."

“Where is she now?”

“She’s in room fourteen-oh-nine, at the Milsener Hotel.”

8.

We picked up Leda Willard. She was in such a state of panic that it took us almost two hours to get a coherent story from her. But when we did, it was a complete admission. She was too frightened to fight us, even too frightened to be capable of lying. She completely absolved Janice Pedrick and Eddie Willard of any implication.

Four nights later we cornered Bucky Sullivan in the men’s room

of a bar in Harlem. He shot it out with us, and took two slugs through the chest. While he was waiting to be operated on, he became convinced he was dying and called for a priest. Afterward, he made a full admission. Declarations by persons who think they are dying are powerful instruments. It was powerful enough to close the case for us, though Bucky Sullivan lived through the operation.

He was very bitter toward the doctor who saved him. He couldn’t understand why the State should save his life — only to send him up the river and take it away from him again in the electric chair.



MUGGED AND PRINTED

MICKEY SPILLANE isn't satisfied with being the creator of Mike Hammer and the top-selling writer in the world today. He's been



branching out, as moviegoers throughout the world know. Not only have two pictures based on his famous novels *I, The Jury* and *The Long Wait* been released nationally, but he's also made his acting debut in the new *Ring Of Fear*. His

latest story for *Manhunt*, *The Pickpocket*, is something of a departure, too. Instead of featuring Mike Hammer, this story stars a new character Spillane has developed: Willie, the reformed pickpocket. We think you'll like him as much as any other Spillane character.

HENRY KANE, whose new complete novel, *Precise Moment*, is featured in this issue, is the famous creator of Peter Chambers. As an ex-



lawyer, Kane's had to do a lot of work with the police and with private eyes, and it's rumored that Chambers may be a composite portrait of several private detectives now operating. In addition to his many appearances in *Manhunt*, Chambers has been fea-

tured in the widely popular novels including *Armchair In Hell*, *Report For A Corpse*, *Halo For Nobody* and others.

HAL ELLSON, author of the best-selling *Duke*, returns this month with the tough and surprising *Six Fingers*. ♦ EVAN HUNTER's novel, *The Blackboard Jungle*, which is being made into an M-G-M movie, will soon be on sale in bookstores. While waiting for the book, take a look at Hunter's *The Scarlet King*. ♦ RICHARD S. PRATHER's newest Shell Scott novel is called *Always Leave 'Em Dying*. His newest Shell Scott short story is called *Crime Of Passion*, in this issue. ♦ RICHARD DEMING's Manville Moon appears in the new Rinehart book, *Whistle Past The Graveyard*. You can also meet Moon in *Death Sentence*, a startling new short story in this issue. ♦ JONATHAN CRAIG is back with another fine and authentic documentary this month. Craig's latest is called *The Purple Collar*. ♦ HAROLD Q. MASUR returns to *Manhunt* with a surprising new story, *Dead Issue*.

CRAIG RICE, the only woman to appear in this all-star issue of *Manhunt*, is also the only detective-story writer ever to appear on the cover of *Time Magazine*,



an honor usually reserved for Presidents, world-famous scientists, and the like. She's the creator of John J. Malone, the lawyer-detective who's appeared in *Having Wonderful Crime*, *Eight Faces At Three*, *The Wrong Murder* (followed, logically enough, by *The Right Murder*), *The Fourth Postman* and other books. Malone's also been featured on radio, TV and the movies and, of course, in many issues of *Manhunt* — though possibly never to such good effect as in the current *Flowers To The Fair*.

FRANK KANE, a familiar figure to *Manhunt* readers, is the author of many novels featuring his tough and knowledgeable private eye, Johnny Liddell. The books in which Liddell's appeared include *Green Light For Death*, *Slay Ride*, *Poisons Unknown* and his latest, *Grave Danger*. Kane's authentic local color, his grasp of police technique and all the important details of homicide investigation, have combined with his writing ability to make such stories as *Big Steal* favorites with readers and critics.

