

# KEYHOLE MYSTERY

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JUNE



*Magazine*



## THE TRAP

by Norman Daniels



A new story by  
**JOHN COLLIER**



Lawrence G. Blochman • Theodore Sturgeon

Rog Phillips • Mary Thayer Muller • Joseph Whitehill

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## *Magazine*

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*The two young people were being watched, night after night. There was no way to escape. Then Fate gave them an unexpected chance to strike back at their tormentor . . .*

# THE TRAP

*by* NORMAN DANIELS

**T**HE HEAT WAS OPPRESSIVE, EXHAUSTING. In the three room, second floor walkup, it seemed a little worse than anywhere else.

Gwen Thatcher came in from the kitchen with a fresh bowl of ice cubes and made more cold tea. She was a tall, well-proportioned girl of twenty, but there were dark circles under her eyes and she had acquired an intense, worried look these past four days.

"Is he still there?" she asked.

Ted Young, standing beside the window which overlooked the dusty, hot street, moved away.

"He's there," he said bitterly. "He's *always* there. Four nights now."

She drank some of the iced tea and went over to the window to look down. The man on the sidewalk was named Dan Kendall. He was about fifty, a heavy-set man. He stood there, across the street from the tenement and he wasn't moving at all, except to now and then remove a cigar butt from his lips. Despite the heat, his suit was an all-year-round woolen that hung on him like wrinkles on an old rhino.

He was a cop. A detective, working out of a nearby precinct.

Gwen moved back from the window.

"I can't help feeling sorry for him," she said. "He looks so un-

comfortable.”

To Ted, she was as unpredictable as she was lovely.

“Gwen, does it ever enter your sweet and innocent little mind that he’s out there for one reason? To make sure you and I don’t start running. And then, when they think the time is right, he’s coming up here to arrest us for murder.”

She nodded, sipped her iced tea. “Of course you’re right,” she said. “You know, Ted, what I resent more than anything else about this whole thing is the fact that they actually think you and I killed my Aunt Annie. Why . . . I loved Aunt Annie. She was one of the nicest persons I’ve ever known. She even left me all her money.”

“And established a nice little motive against us,” Ted said. “But sweetie, there’s a lot more to it than that. The maniac who killed Aunt Annie also killed two other defenseless old ladies who were supposed to keep a lot of cash around. If they ever pin that on me . . .” He left the thought unfinished.

“Just when we were thinking of getting married,” Gwen sighed. “When Aunt Annie left us six thousand dollars, I thought all our dreams would come true.”

“I don’t think he ever sleeps.” Ted angrily pointed at the window. “All he does is live in the hope of arresting us. Boy, if I

was a murderer, I’d have taken care of *him* a long time ago.”

“But Teddy, when they brought us to the precinct and asked us questions, our stories didn’t jibe. You have to admit they didn’t. So you can’t blame them for suspecting us.”

He gestured impatiently. “How are we supposed to remember everything we did a week ago . . . two weeks ago? All that sticks in my mind is the moment when Kendall came in and told us we were wanted downtown. He didn’t say why—he just took us. Then they asked us all those questions and maybe we didn’t answer them too accurately, but what of it? Neither of us kept any notes about what we did the last couple of months since those murders started.”

“Well,” Gwen said airily, as if to throw all this unpleasantness off, “we’re not guilty, so we don’t have anything to worry about.”

“Oh, no?” Ted said, with more than usual sarcasm. “They can arrest us when they want to. Then we’ll have to get a lawyer and that’ll cost every dime your aunt left you. Besides, Kendall’s been haunting my office—and yours. I don’t know about your boss, but mine is touchy when it comes to police asking questions.”

Gwen tried to change the subject. “Let’s see if there’s any air stirring on the back fire-escape. I’ll get some pillows to sit on.”

They clambered through the

kitchen window, settled the pillows and made themselves as comfortable as possible. Gwen looked at the solid brick wall opposite, at the starkly lighted back alley below. The stench from unwashed tin cans was magnified by the heat.

"Isn't the river bank green and beautiful?" she asked, jestingly. "And the breeze... I declare it smells like magnolias. Do magnolias smell good, Teddy?"

He said, "I thought I'd take you out of this before now, Gwen. I would have too, if this hadn't happened."

"We'll be out of it soon, Ted. They'll stop bothering us and we'll have Aunt Annie's money. You have your job and I have mine..."

He didn't look at her. "When I said my boss is touchy about a police check on his employees, that wasn't a lie. He fired me."

She sat up. "Oh, Ted."

"Detective Kendall talked to him again yesterday and this morning the boss told me he couldn't afford to keep anybody around who was even suspected of murder... I'm sorry, Gwen. We're just not getting the breaks these days."

She leaned against him and put her head on his shoulder. It had all happened so fast. Their plans to get married, the scrimping and saving. The cold-blooded killer murdering elderly women who

lived alone had seemed very remote in their lives. Then the murderer struck again, Gwen's aunt this time. Gwen had been at home at the time of the murder, all alone, and therefore without an alibi.

Ted, who had known Aunt Annie very well and often dropped in to see her, had no alibi either. He'd been at home too—in his room at the modest bachelor hotel where he lived, and nobody saw him come in or go out.

And then there was the six thousand dollars...

Maybe Detective Kendall had a right to suspect them at first, but he ought to know better by now. The way they'd been interrogated, separately, together, at her apartment, at Teddy's room. Everyone they knew had been questioned until they both felt they didn't have a friend left. Nobody wanted to be linked with a boy or girl suspected of three killings.

"What are we going to do?" she asked him.

"I don't know. Nothing. Just wait. The cops always make the play. When they whistle, we jump. Oh gosh, I wish *you* weren't mixed up in this."

"It'll all work out, Teddy."

He nodded, but she could feel his neck muscles tighten as he tried to hide his apprehension.

"Something I'm grateful for. You never once asked me if I did kill your Aunt Annie."

She raised her head swiftly. "Why, Teddy, it never crossed my mine. I never once..."

She gradually lowered her voice. She was peering down into the rear courtyard below. Ted, attracted by her tenseness, also bent over to look. A man—slightly intoxicated—was weaving a little as he walked along the areaway. Behind him, without his realizing it, were three boys in open-neck shirts, black leather jackets and sneakers. They all looked alike, long hair, swaggering walk, the same intentness. One picked up a loose housebrick which was being used to weigh down the lid of a trash can. Suddenly before Ted or Gwen could shout a warning, the three boys sprang forward and leaped on the man.

Their victim gave one wild yell before the brick hit him again and again. When he went down, two of the boys bent over him and frisked his pockets. It was all over in seconds.

On the fire escape Ted grabbed Gwen's hand in excitement. Detective Kendall began to run toward the boys and their victim.

One boy spotted the detective in time and went running down the areaway as fast he could travel. The other two stood up slowly, raising their hands under the threat of Kendall's revolver. The third boy made a turn at the end of the areaway.

"That one got clear," Ted said.

"No, he didn't," she whispered. "The direction he ran... it's blind. Just wall. He has to come back."

Teddy looked down at Kendall. "Maybe Kendall doesn't know it."

Kendall was examining the mugging victim after compelling the two surly boys to lie flat with their hands clasped behind them. Kendall was peering down the areaway, watching and waiting.

The third boy had to retreat, as Gwen had prophesied. When he came into view, he started running as fast as he could toward the nearest alley.

"Hold it!" Kendall shouted.

He pointed his gun upwards, fired once. The boy kept going. Kendall leveled the gun, took aim and brought him down with one bullet. Then he stayed where he was, guarding his prisoners. Before very long they heard sirens and a patrolman came running. Kendall turned the boys and their victim over to him and loped clumsily down the areaway to where the third boy lay, ominously still.

Kendall looked up, directly at the fire-escape. Gwen shuddered and was glad of Ted's protective arm.

"Ted, the way that third boy went down, I... I think he's dead. Don't you?"

Ted helped her up. "Let's go inside," he suggested.

She knew very well Ted want-

ed to get her away from watching what would follow if anyone were dead down there. They sat in the stuffy little parlor for an hour or so, until the excitement out back finally died away. Ted went to the front window, looked down at the street:

"Nobody there." He turned back toward Gwen. "Flatfoot's gone. It feels like someone lifted a blanket from my head."

Gwen looked thoughtful. "I wonder if they'll want us as witnesses?"

"We didn't see it," Ted said earnestly. "We don't want to get mixed up with anything that concerns the police. We don't owe them a thing. Not a thing, Gwen. We stay out of it—agreed?"

"But what if they ask us . . . ?"

"They can't make us say we saw it. I had all I can take of cops for the rest of my life. How about you?"

"Yes," she said, in a hard little voice. "I've had all I can take too."

"Well," Ted said, "I'd better be on my way. I have to get up early and hunt a job, thanks to Kendall and the police. No kidding, Gwen, I'm beginning to feel like an ex-con."

She followed him to the door. "It'll all work out," she said again.

The next day, Ted came over to Gwen's apartment at the usual time. He was scarcely there half an hour when there came a knock at the door.

The hard knock was as familiar as if the caller had shouted his name. Only Kendall's big fist knocked like that.

Gwen opened the door and Kendall stood there, all two hundred and thirty pounds of him. His clothes gave off the faint aroma of fresh sweat, and cheap cigars.

"Well, now," he said, "it's good I found you two kids home. How about me stepping in?"

"Look," Ted said, "if this is an arrest, why bother? We're ready. We've been ready for days."

"Who said it's a pinch?" Kendall asked mildly and closed the door behind him. He took off his hat and mopped his forehead. "Hot, ain't it? Look, you two were out on the fire-escape when that little fracas happened yesterday."

"We were there part of the time," Ted admitted cautiously.

"The guy they hit may die," Kendall said. "The one I shot is already dead, but that ain't the worst of it. Y'see . . . the other two kids say they never saw the dead one before in their lives."

Ted's hand sought Gwen's and squeezed significantly.

"So what's that to us?" he asked.

"Well, I'm in a jam over that shooting. I gave that crazy kid fair warning, but he wouldn't stop. This dead boy happens to be the son of Malcolm Ramsey, who is some kind of a big shot, and



Ramsey says his son never ran with those other two kids. Also, Ramsey got to those two kids and offered to defend them. We can't prove it, but there's some kind of a deal. If they say the dead boy wasn't with them, they get a top-notch lawyer."

"No kidding," Ted said. "That means you killed the wrong boy."

Kendall shook his big head. "You two kids know I didn't. You saw the whole thing. How about it?"

"I'm sorry," Ted said firmly. "We just happened to look out the window and heard the shot and then we stepped out."

Kendall eyed the pair of them sharply before he went to the window and leaned out.

"Yeah," he said. "You heard the ruckus and got curious and you just stepped out."

"That's how it happened," Ted said.

Kendall stared at them a long moment. Then he said glumly, "Well, that's how it is."

"So long," Ted said. "Or are you going to tail me home like you always do?"

"I guess not," Kendall said. "Not tonight. I'm sorry this had to happen. You're a couple of nice kids."

"Sure." Ted couldn't keep the lilt of triumph out of his voice. "We're real nice kids. All the cops think so, especially you. We're such nice kids I lost my job be-

cause you snooped around the place where I worked."

Kendall's eyebrows shot upwards. "Is that so? Nobody told me. I'm sorry, boy. I really am."

He walked out slowly and they could hear his ponderous steps fade down the corridor until he reached the stairs. Suddenly Gwen threw her arms around Ted.

"I wish we'd told the truth, Ted."

"So what'd happen if we did? They'd drag us downtown again and question us for hours, and we'd have to go into court, and what then? Can you imagine the kind of publicity we'd get when those high-priced lawyers of Ramsey's got through with us? We're murder suspects already. We'd be convicted of killing your aunt without even going on trial for it. No, sir... I've had my belly full of cops. All I want is out."

She nodded slowly. "I guess that's right, Ted."

"Besides, we don't owe Kendall a thing, and anyway no cop ever gets in trouble he can't get out of. Stop worrying about him and start worrying about us. We're still a long way from being in the clear."

They followed the Kendall case closely in the newspaper items during the next week. Detective Kendall was accused of being a trigger-happy cop, of having shot the wrong boy. The pair of young hoodlums he'd arrested swore that

the dead boy hadn't been with them and that they'd never seen him before.

"Gets me," Ted said to Gwen one night, "why we haven't been bothered. You'd think Kendall would try to sweat it out of us."

"I wonder what'll happen to him?" Gwen said.

"They'll probably suspend him for awhile, that's all."

Gwen showed him an item in the evening newspaper. "It says here he hasn't been suspended yet because of his record. He's been with the department for thirty years, Ted."

Ted looked out the front window. It was a relief not to have Kendall always waiting there in the shadows. Ted doubted whether anyone else had been assigned to the job and this puzzled him, but maybe the police were just figuring on giving him and Gwen plenty of rope.

Suddenly he turned around with a grunt of annoyance. "I'll say they didn't suspend him. Take a look."

Gwen peered down at the sidewalk across the street. Kendall was back. She saw the heavy-set figure, unmoving, the inevitable cigar dangling from his lips.

Gwen was angry. "I wish he'd leave us alone. We haven't done anything, or hurt anybody. If he'd just listen to us... believe us..."

"A cop," Ted said, "doesn't be-

lieve anybody. That's how he runs his business. Look, let's stop talking about it. So happens I've a little good news for a change."

"You found a job?" She could see she'd hit it right on target. "Ted, I'm so happy. Honestly... I'm so darned happy..."

"A better one than I had before," he said, grinning. "Funny thing, I tried to get a job there right after I was fired and they wouldn't even listen. But the personnel manager called me in this afternoon and said I could start Monday."

She was so delighted she actually forgot about Kendall. It seemed to her their lives had begun again. Ted was caught up in her infectious gaiety and went out for some beer and sandwiches. She watched him leave the building and saw him wave challengingly at Kendall, who merely removed his cigar and nodded.

Around eleven o'clock they noticed Kendall was gone. He'd never left that early before, but they thought he might just have given up.

And then came the knock. Different this time. Almost timid.

Gwen opened the door. A woman stood there, a very plain woman with a rather shabby handbag, and it was obvious that the black dress she wore was her best.

"Is this Gwen Thatcher? And," she looked into the room, "Ted Young?"

"Yes," Gwen said.

"You look like such nice young people," the woman said. "I'm Luciana Kendall. My husband is the detective. Or like he calls himself, the cop."

"Well... what do you want?" Gwen asked uncertainly.

"A favor. A very big favor. If you will let me come in, please..."

Ted moved forward. "Mrs. Kendall, we're very sorry for your troubles, but there's nothing we can..."

"Come in, Mrs. Kendall," Gwen said.

Mrs. Kendall settled herself in a chair in the living room and fumbled with the handbag as if she were ill at ease.

"My husband is going to be fired from the force. No, wait," she looked up sharply. "Don't say you're sorry. Wait until I finish. I don't want to ask for your sympathy. These things happen to the best of policemen. They, and their wives, are prepared for it."

"We're sorry, Mrs. Kendall," Gwen said. "Really we are."

"Yes, I believe that. You're so young... so pretty, and this boy, Ted—a nice boy, Dan says."

"What do you want from us?" Ted asked.

"Only the truth. You're angry because Dan had to question you so much. That's why you won't help him."

"Tell me one good reason why

we should," Ted asked. "Just name one reason."

The older woman said, "There can be but one reason—the truth, no matter whom it hurts, or whom it harms. If you didn't see what happened, then tell me so and I will go away. Otherwise, help me. Help Dan."

"We told you..." Ted began, not quite so vehemently.

Gwen said, "Mrs. Kendall, did you know your husband has been watching us night after night? Interfering with us, asking questions that embarrassed us, that even caused Ted to lose his job?"

She nodded slowly. "From the first, Dan said it was a surveillance job. The questioning and all that—he didn't tell me about. He never talks much about his work, but when there is a surveillance job, then I know, for he's never home. Never! He stays out all night. He forgets to sleep and eat. The fact that he gets no pay for it doesn't matter..."

"What do you mean, no pay?" Ted asked, with doubt in his voice.

"These extra hours... his off-duty time. That's when he watches you."

"He does it on his own time?" Gwen asked, in complete wonder.

"Why, of course. The department wouldn't stand for that kind of hours unless they were absolutely convinced the man to be watched would run away..."

Gwen said, "Mrs. Kendall, I don't know what you're driving at. We've hated your husband watching us every moment, and now we learn he was doing it in his spare time. Well...I suppose we should hate him even more, but..." She went to Ted's side and took his hand in her own, "I've had enough, Ted. I guess I never realized a cop had a family, or that anyone on earth loved them. Ted...what do you say?"

He nodded glumly. "I suppose so. To tell the truth, it's been bothering me too."

"Then—we'd better go down to the precinct and explain," Gwen said.

Ted found he could smile. "All we have to do is yell for Dan to come up here."

"Dan's gone...remember?" Gwen said.

"Gone?" Mrs. Kendall asked quickly. "Something must have happened. He wouldn't leave for a moment. He'd be afraid this... this murderer would kill someone else and you wouldn't have an alibi..."

Ted stared at her uncomprehendingly. It was Gwen who first understood what Mrs. Kendall meant.

She said, "Your husband's been out there all these nights watching us so...so if the murderer struck again, your husband could swear Ted *couldn't* be the man?"

"Didn't you understand that?" Mrs. Kendall said. "He was sure you weren't guilty, but he couldn't prove it and neither could you. However, as he said, this killer strikes with a certain pattern so there's no mistaking him. If he kills another—and you weren't near the scene, then you must be innocent of the other crimes, too. That's the way the police work many, many times. That's what Dan means by a surveillance job. It's to protect you, not worry you."

"Well, what do you know?" Ted gasped.

"Dan was sorry you lost your job. He talked to some people and said maybe...just maybe, he'd done you some good. My heavens, young man, do you think cops do nothing but arrest people? Their job is to protect you. That's what Dan's been doing."

They sent Mrs. Kendall home in a cab and went down to the precinct right away. Dan Kendall was there and very happy to see them. It seemed that the murderer had attacked another woman, and he'd been caught. The whole thing was over.

They let Ted and Gwen go home much later, after they told the whole story of what they had seen. No one told them they were silly young idiots for having withheld the truth so long.

They knew that without being told. ■ ■