

# GUILTY

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### CONTENTS

#### SHORT STORIES

- THE NUDE IN THE DEEP FREEZE *by James Rosenquest* ..... 2  
Rigor mortis hadn't set in, the body was on ice
- BEATNIK WIFE *by Dan Malcolm* ..... 14  
When a wife turns beatnik it's bad, man, bad!
- SIDE JOB *by Carroll Mayers* ..... 23  
The killing had to be smooth and slick
- MAD DOG KILLER *by Neal Neitzel* ..... 29  
A human beast, he wasn't fit to live
- I DON'T WANT NO TROUBLE *by Ed Chase* ..... 39  
I had my mitts on some really big money
- ON WITH THE KILLING *by Dan Brennan* ..... 48  
I was a racket man, couldn't wince at murder
- DEATH CAN BE BEAUTIFUL *by Russell Thompson* ..... 61  
Mark had a neat racket. It concerned death
- THE UGLY WOMAN *by Michael Zurroy* ..... 72  
She wanted only one thing -- but bad!
- STEPPING UP IN CLASS *by Henry H. Guild* ..... 84  
I wanted to get ahead fast, fast, fast!
- WALK AWAY FROM DEATH *by Harrison Smith* ..... 97  
I was scared but capable of violent action

#### NOVELETTE

- DEADLY CALL GIRL *by Ray McKensie* ..... 104  
Expensive, she could cost a man his life

W. W. Scott — Editor

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# WALK AWAY FROM DEATH

by HARRISON SMITH

I was scared but still capable of some violent action

I was scared, scared all the way down to my pants.

It's not that I'm a coward. A weak sister couldn't last in the marines, and I was a judo instructor in Parris Island for a while. And after that I did

my share in Korea.

Of course, as a guy gets older and gets a little more sense, he slows down a bit, becomes a little cautious; but that doesn't mean he's a coward. He might not look for trouble, but that



doesn't mean he'll run if trouble comes looking for him.

But I was scared now. Real scared.

Shaking scared.

From where we live it's about a mile to the nearest movie house. Usually after our Sunday dinner Marie and I drive down there. I like one night a week away from the typewriter. But tonight, the weather being so nice, spring in the air and all that, we decided to walk to the movie and home.

Almost like being young again, walking hand in hand, eating popcorn, laughing together, real fun time.

It was about a quarter to twelve when we left the movie and started back home.

We'd seen *North To Alaska*, and laughed so much our sides hurt. I still can't understand how they can stage those rough-house fights without anyone getting hurt. And those scenes in the mud, they were the greatest. I'd like to write something like that.

We were walking along Handen Boulevard. This is a small main street in the suburbs.

There are stores in groups for several blocks, then there are a few sparsely settled blocks, then some more stores. It's not entirely deserted, but you can go for a few blocks and see little sign of activity.

We were passing Bolger's delicatessen, which was the only store in one deserted area and about six blocks from where we lived. I'd noticed earlier on our way to the movies a sign in the window which read: Closed due to death in family, will reopen Tuesday.

Marie was laughing and said, "And that Ernie Kovacs, when he got up, with all that mud—"

The surprise was complete; we didn't have time to think.

We were just in front of the big plate glass window of the delicatessen when the four punks jumped out of the darkened doorway. A red neon beer sign cast eerie devilish shadows across their crime-hardened faces.

Two of the black-jacketed hoods grabbed Marie and yanked her away from my side. Before she could utter a cry, they had her arms pinned to

her sides and one of the punks clamped a grimey paw over her mouth. They dragged her toward the curb.

I took a step toward her, shouting, "Get your goddam filthy hands off of my wife." Frantically, I glanced up and down the avenue, seeking help. The street was deserted.

The biggest of the group jumped between us. He looked about six-foot-one and must have weighed about 190. His black leather jacket flapped loosely and his right hand jutted forward.

I heard the *snick* as the blade of his switch knife sprang out, saw the glint of the street lamp on the bare steel. I began to tremble and the bile was bitter in my throat.

"What the hell is this?" I demanded, not able to keep the tremor out of my voice. I tried to feel brave, but I couldn't.

Marie was struggling helplessly in the grip of the two hoods and I heard her moan. I glanced past the punk in front of me. Marie was trying to squirm away as the third hood probed under her coat with his hands.

He said: "How do ya like

that, baby? I think you'd really get hot with the right spark, huh, baby?"

I pushed forward with a curse and the punk with the knife rested the blade against my throat. He was so close I could smell the beer on his breath. I knew they must have broken into the delicatessen and spent the evening drinking stolen beer. And after they were tanked up they had the courage to grab the first unarmed couple that happened to walk along the street.

The sharp point of the blade drew blood and I felt it trickle down my neck. I was scared. But not for me—for Marie.

Blind rage began to boil up inside me.

I glanced again at Marie. The punk was pushing one hand down the front of her dress, a leer on his moist lips.

"Feels good, eh, baby?" he grinned.

Marie was struggling violently shaking her head, trying to break loose from the grip across her mouth. She managed to get her lips free and she started to scream.

I watched, helplessly, ashamed.

The big guy with the knife at my throat glanced quickly around at Marie and the three punks.

The distraction was all I needed.

I don't know how I did it. The rules of judo were long forgotten, but instinct prevailed. I reached up, grasped his wrist, gave a sudden lunge and a twist and I had him in an arm lock, his lithe body bent forward. With my left hand I grabbed a fistful of oil-slick hair and pulled his head back till the thick neck-muscles strained and bulged.

He dropped his knife to the ground. His voice, a choking sob, gurgled in his throat and he breathed, "Take it easy, daddy-o we was only kidding."

The other punk pulled his hands from Marie's breasts and turned toward me. "Sure, dad," he mouthed, "like, we was only having a little kicks. We wasn't goin' to hurt your queen." He took several steps toward me, empty hands outstretched.

"Let her go," I grated, "or I'll break his neck."

"Okay, okay," one of them

mumbled. They released Marie's arms and stood there, arms dangling, slavering lips hanging wide.

I watched as the one punk approached. He took another step. And another.

Then I acted.

Still holding the big punk in an armlock, I pivoted sharply to the left, releasing his head just as his face smashed into the plate glass window.

There was a terrific crash as shards of glass came boiling down to the sidewalk. A cardboard beer advertisement went tumbling into a corner, the empty brown bottles tumbling and smashing. One end of the electric beer sign broke loose and it dangled, swaying back and forth, casting a wavering red glow into the street.

The punk gave a scream which tapered off to a bubbling gurgle. Another chunk of window glass clattered down, striking him alongside the head and neck. Blood spurted from his jugular vein.

I sprang back; turned to face the others.

The other punk was still coming toward me, his face a mask of hate, but now he had

his blade clutched in outstretched hand.

Quickly I bent down and grasped a long, pointed shard of glass. I whipped a handkerchief from my pocket, wrapped it around my hand and stood ready with 18 inches of razor-sharp weapon in my fist.

"Come and get it," I snarled.

The punk faltered; glanced over his shoulder. His two buddies were still standing near the curb, mouths hanging. Their eyes darted to the spurting blood of their fallen leader.

"Come on, cats," the punk grated, "let's take him."

They seemed to get their wits back and slowly closed in.

The other punk took another step. I lashed out with my glass rapier. The hood jumped back a step and I missed.

Again he started forward.

I lunged, breath hot in my nostrils. My spear caught him high on the left cheek, ripped through muscle and flesh and left his ear dangling by a few threads of skin. He screamed and collapsed to the sidewalk, both hands clasped to his face, trying to stem the flow of blood. He rolled over several times, moaning in agony.

The other two closed in fast, knives flashing.

I braced myself for the attack, my "blade" held firmly in front of me. They came in from each side, flanking me. I fainted with my weapon. I wanted to glance past them, to see if Marie was all right, but I didn't dare take my eyes from them.

I fainted again, jabbing at the hood on my right.

He jumped back, gasping, and the other one lashed out with his foot, his voice a low growl.

Pain flashed up through my arm and my weapon went flying and shattered on the edge of the curb. I heard the rending of cloth; felt the searing stab of pain as my left arm was ripped to the bone by slashing steel.

Blood, warm and sticky, gushed down my wrist, and a wave of nausea washed over me. I bit my lips to hold back the pain.

I lashed out with my good right arm, grasped a fistful of matted hair and spun around. I heaved with all my strength. There was a rending crash as the punk dove head-first into

the remaining piece of plate glass window. The swaying neon sign fell in a shower of sparks and winked out. The punk's scream was drowned in the noise as the glass shattered, spewing across the concrete.

The remaining punk stopped in mid-stride. He was alone, now. His arms hung loosely. His vapid eyes darted to his three companions, lying in the clutter of broken glass, drowning in their own blood. His mouth sagged. He breathed heavily, nostrils flaring, and he ran one dirty hand through his thick mop of uncut hair. His mouth sagged. He closed his switch-blade; put both hands in front of him, pleading. Fear rose in his face; came into his eyes.

I could almost smell his fear.

"I've had enough," he cried. "I've had enough mister."

"I haven't," I snarled, leaping forward.

He turned to run, legs rubbery.

I grabbed him by the back of his collar, yanked him off his feet and slammed him down.

He landed on his back on the sidewalk and threw his arms over his head to protect his face. He was whimpering, now.

Whimpering—and scared.

Scared, like I was. . .

I lashed at him with bleeding knuckles, splitting his lips with the first blow. Blood flowed. I took him by the hair and rapped his skull against the concrete a dozen times. Then I stood up and stomped him. I kicked in his ribs; I ground my heel into his crotch; I slammed my foot against his head, and again, until he stopped moaning. I used both feet on his face, till it was a bloody pulp.

Marie was tugging at my sleeve. "My God, Larry," she cried. "Stop it, stop it! You'll kill him. Larry, Larry, please." "I intend to," I grated, and stomped on his crotch again.

Suddenly like a breath of fresh air, sanity returned.

I looked around at the others. The punks were still lying where they had fallen. One was breathing; two were not.

My arm ached. My body ached. Pain seemed to block out all other feeling. I looked

down at my hand; saw the clotted blood on my fingers; my slashed coat. I looked at Marie.

She was standing near the curb, hands covering her face, and sobbing. Her shoulders shook; she was trembling.

I went over to her, put my good arm around her waist and started to lead her away.

She uncovered her tear-stained eyes, peered up at me. "But, Larry," she said tremulously, "you're not going to

leave them there like that, are you?"

I pulled her close to me. "How do you think they would have left us?" I asked. "How do you think they would have left you?"

She shuddered. "But but—the police?" she asked.

"They'll find them," I said. "In time."

We turned, and walked away from death.

THE END

