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MC BAIN

AN 87TH PRECINCT NOVEL

ED

HAIL, HAIL,
THE GANG'S
ALL HERE!

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AN 87TH PRECINCT NOVEL



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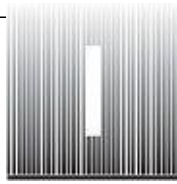
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The city in these pages is imaginary.
~~The people, the places are all fictitious.~~
Only the police routine is based on
established investigatory techniques.



Nightshade

The morning hours of the night come imperceptibly here.

It is a minute before midnight on the peeling face of the hanging wall clock, and then it is midnight, and then the minute hand moves visibly and with a lurch into the new day. The morning hours have begun, but scarcely anyone has noticed. The stale coffee in soggy cardboard containers tastes the same as it did thirty seconds ago, the spastic rhythm of the clacking typewriters continues unabated, a drunk across the room shouts that the world is full of brutality, and cigarette smoke drifts up toward the face of the clock, where, unnoticed and unmourned, the old day has already been dead for two minutes. The telephone rings.

The men in this room are part of a tired routine, somewhat shabby about the edges, as faded and as gloomy as the room itself, with its cigarette-scarred desks and its smudged green walls. This could be the office of a failing insurance company were it not for the evidence of the holstered pistols hanging from belts on the backs of wooden chairs painted a darker green than the walls. The furniture is ancient, the typewriters are ancient, the building itself is ancient—which is perhaps only fitting since these men are involved in what is an ancient pursuit, a pursuit once considered honorable. They are law enforcers. They are, in the words of the drunk still hurling epithets from the grilled detention cage across the room, rotten prick cop bastards.

The telephone continues to ring.

The little girl lying in the alley behind the theater was wearing a belted white trench coat with blood. There was blood on the floor of the alley, and blood on the metal fire door behind her, and blood on her face and matted in her blond hair, blood on her miniskirt and on the lavender tights she wore. A neon sign across the street stained the girl's ebbing life juices green and then orange, while from the open knife wound in her chest, the blood sprouted like some ghastly night flower, dark and rich, red, orange, green, pulsing in time to the neon flicker, a grotesque psychedelic light show, and then losing the rhythm, welling up with less force and power. She opened her mouth, she tried to speak, and the scream of an ambulance approaching the theater seemed to come instead from her

mouth on a fresh bubble of blood. The blood stopped, her life ended, the girl's eyes rolled back in her head. Detective Steve Carella turned away as the ambulance attendants rushed a stretcher into the alley. He told them the girl was already dead.

"We got here in seven minutes," one of the attendants said.

"Nobody's blaming you," Carella answered.

"This is Saturday night," the attendant complained. "Streets are full of traffic. Even *with* the damn siren."

Carella walked to the unmarked sedan parked at the curb. Detective Cotton Hawes, sitting behind the wheel, rolled down his frost-rimed window and said, "How is she?"

"We've got a homicide," Carella answered.

The boy was eighteen years old, and he had been picked up not ten minutes ago for breaking off twelve car aerials. He had broken off twelve on the same street, strewing them behind him like a John Appleseed planting radios; a cruising squad car had spotted him as he tried to twist off the aerial of a 1966 Cadillac. He was drunk or stoned or both, and when Sergeant Murchison at the muster desk asked him to read the Miranda-Escobedo warning signs on the wall, printed in both English and Spanish, he could read neither. The arresting patrolman took the boy to the squadroom upstairs, where Detective Bert Kling was talking to Hawes on the telephone. He signaled for the patrolman to wait with his prisoner on the bench outside the slatted wooden rail divider and then buzzed Murchison at the desk downstairs.

"Dave," he said, "we've got a homicide in the alley of the Eleventh Street Theater. You want to get it rolling?"

"Right," Murchison said, and hung up.

Homicides are a common occurrence in this city, and each one is treated identically, the grisly horror of violent death reduced to routine by a police force that would otherwise be overwhelmed by the statistics. At the muster desk switchboard downstairs, while upstairs Kling waved the patrolman and his prisoner into the squadroom, Sergeant Murchison first reported the murder to Captain Frick, who commanded the 87th Precinct, and then to Lieutenant Byrnes, who commanded the 87th Detective Squad. He then phoned Homicide, who in turn set into motion an escalating process of notification that spread cancerously to include the police laboratory; the Telegraph, Telephone, and Teletype Bureau at Headquarters; the medical examiner; the district attorney; the district commander of the Detective Division; the chief of detectives; and finally the police commissioner himself. Someone had thoughtlessly robbed a young woman of her life, and now a lot of sleepy-eyed men were being shaken out of their beds on a cold October night.

Upstairs, the clock on the squadroom wall read 12:30 A.M. The boy who had broken off twelve car aerials sat in a chair alongside Bert Kling's desk. Kling took one look at him and yelled to Miscolo in the clerical office to bring in a pot of strong coffee. Across the room, the drunk in the detention cage wanted to know where he was. In a little while, they would release him with a warning to try to stay sober till morning.

But the night was young.

They arrived alone or in pairs, blowing on their hands, shoulders hunched against the bitter cold, breaths pluming whitely from their lips. They marked the dead girl's position in the alleyway, they took her picture, they made drawings of the scene, they searched for the murder weapon and found none, and then they stood around speculating on sudden death. In this alleyway alongside a theater, the policemen were the stars and the celebrities, and a curious crowd thronged the sidewalk where a barricade had already been set up, anxious for a glimpse of these men with their shields pinned to the

overcoats—the identifying *Playbills* of law enforcement, without which you could not tell the civilians from the plainclothes cops.

Monaghan and Monroe had arrived from Homicide, and they watched dispassionately now as the assistant medical examiner fluttered around the dead girl. They were both wearing black overcoats, black mufflers, and black fedoras, both heavier men than Carella, who stood between them with the lean look of an overtrained athlete, a pained expression on his face.

“He done some job on her,” Monroe said.

“Son of a bitch,” Monaghan added.

“You identified her yet?”

“I’m waiting for the ME to get through,” Carella answered.

“Might help to know what she was doing here in the alley. What’s that door there?” Monroe asked.

“Stage entrance.”

“Think she was in the show?”

“I don’t know,” Carella said.

“Well, what the hell,” Monaghan said, “they’re finished with her pocketbook there, ain’t they? Why don’t you look through it? You finished with that pocketbook there?” he yelled to one of the lab technicians.

“Yeah, anytime you want it,” the technician shouted back.

“Go on, Carella, take a look.”

The technician wiped the blood off the dead girl’s bag, and handed it to Carella. Monaghan and Monroe crowded in on him as he twisted open the clasp.

“Bring it over to the light,” Monroe said.

The light, with a metal shade, hung over the stage door. So violently had the girl been stabbed that flecks of blood had even dotted the enameled white underside of the shade. In her bag they found a driver’s license identifying her as Mercy Howell of 1113 Rutherford Avenue, Age 24, Height 5’3”, Eyes Blue. They found an Actors Equity card in her name, as well as credit cards for two of the city’s largest department stores. They found an unopened package of Virginia Slims and a book of matches advertising an art course. They found a rat-tailed comb. They found \$17.43 in cash. They found a package of Kleenex and an appointment book. They found a ballpoint pen with shreds of tobacco clinging to its tip, an eyelash curler, two subway tokens, and an advertisement for a see-through blouse, clipped from one of the local newspapers.

In the pocket of her trench coat, when the ME had finished with her and pronounced her dead from multiple stab wounds in the chest and throat, they found an unfired Browning .25-caliber automatic. They tagged the gun and the handbag, and they moved the girl out of the alleyway and into the waiting ambulance for removal to the morgue. There was now nothing left of Mercy Howell but the chalked outline of her body and a pool of her blood on the alley floor.

“You sober enough to understand me?” Kling asked the boy.

“I was never drunk to begin with,” the boy answered.

“Okay then, here we go,” Kling said. “In keeping with the Supreme Court decision in *Miranda v. Arizona*, we are not permitted to ask you any questions until you are warned of your right to counsel and your privilege against self-incrimination.”

“What does that mean?” the boy asked. “Self-incrimination?”

“I’m about to explain that to you now,” Kling said.

“This coffee stinks.”

“First, you have the right to remain silent if you so choose,” Kling said. “Do you understand

that?"

"I understand it."

"Second, you do not have to answer any police questions if you don't want to. Do you understand that?"

"What the hell are you asking me if I understand for? Do I look like a moron or something?"

"The law requires that I ask whether or not you understand these specific warnings. *Did you understand what I just said about not having to answer...?*"

"Yeah, yeah, I understood."

"All right. Third, if you *do* decide to answer any questions, the answers may be used as evidence against you, do you...?"

"What the hell did I do, break off a couple of car aerials? Jesus!"

"Did you understand that?"

"I understood it."

"You also have the right to consult with an attorney before or during police questioning. If you cannot have the money to hire a lawyer, a lawyer will be appointed to consult with you."

Kling gave this warning straight-faced even though he knew that under the Criminal Procedure Code of the city for which he worked, a public defender could not be appointed by the courts until the preliminary hearing. There was no legal provision for the courts *or* the police to appoint counsel during questioning, and there were certainly no police funds set aside for the appointment of attorneys. In theory, a call to the Legal Aid Society should have brought a lawyer up there to the squadroom within minutes, ready and eager to offer counsel to any indigent person desiring it. But, in practice, if this boy sitting beside Kling told him in the next three seconds that he was unable to pay for his own attorney and would like one provided, Kling would not have known just what the hell to do—other than call off the questioning.

"I understand," the boy said.

"You've signified that you understand all the warnings," Kling said, "and now I ask you whether you are willing to answer my questions without an attorney here to counsel you."

"Go shit in your hat," the boy said. "I don't want to answer nothing."

So that was that.

They booked him for criminal mischief, a class-A misdemeanor defined as intentional or reckless damage to the property of another person, and they took him downstairs to a holding cell, to await transportation to the Criminal Courts Building for arraignment.

The phone was ringing again, and a woman was waiting on the bench just outside the squadroom.

The watchman's booth was just inside the metal stage door. An electric clock on the wall behind the watchman's stool read 1:10 A.M. The watchman was a man in his late seventies who did not at all mind being questioned by the police. He came on duty, he told them, at 7:30 each night. The company call was for 8:00, and he was there at the stage door waiting to greet everybody as they arrived to get made up and in costume. Curtain went down at 11:20, and usually most of the kids were out of the theater by 11:45 or, latest, midnight. He stayed on till 9:00 the next morning, when the theater box office opened.

"Ain't much to do during the night except hang around and make sure nobody runs off with the scenery," he said, and chuckled.

"Did you happen to notice what time Mercy Howell left the theater?" Carella asked.

"She the one got killed?" the old man asked.

"Yes," Hawes said. "Mercy Howell. About this high, blonde hair, blue eyes."

"They're *all* about that high, with blonde hair and blue eyes," the old man said, and chuckled again. "I don't know hardly none of them by name. Shows come and go, you know. Be a hell of

chore to have to remember all the kids who go in and out that door.”

“Do you sit here by the door all night?” Carella asked.

“Well, no, not all night. What I do, is I lock the door after everybody’s out and then I check the lights, make sure just the work light’s on. I won’t touch the switchboard, not allowed to, but I can turn out lights in the lobby, for example, if somebody left them on, or down in the toilets, sometimes they leave lights on down in the toilets. Then I come back here to the booth and read or listen to the radio. Along about two o’clock, I check the theater again, make sure we ain’t got no fires or nothing, and then I come back here and make the rounds again at four o’clock, and six o’clock, and again about eight. That’s what I do.”

“You say you lock this door...”

“That’s right.”

“Would you remember what time you locked it tonight?”

“Oh, must’ve been about ten minutes to twelve. Soon as I knew everybody was out.”

“How do you know when they’re out?”

“I give a yell up the stairs there. You see those stairs there? They go up to the dressing room. Dressing rooms are all upstairs in this house. So I go to the steps, and I yell, ‘Locking up! Anybody here?’ And if somebody yells back, I know somebody’s here, and I say, ‘Let’s shake it, honey,’ if it’s a girl, and if it’s a boy, I say, ‘Let’s hurry it up, sonny.’” The old man chuckled again. “With *the* show, it’s sometimes hard to tell which’s the girls and which’s the boys. I manage, though,” he said and again chuckled.

“So you locked that door at ten minutes to twelve?”

“Right.”

“And everybody had left the theater by that time.”

“’Cept me, of course.”

“Did you look out into the alley before you locked the door?”

“Nope. Why should I do that?”

“Did you hear anything outside while you were locking the door?”

“Nope.”

“Or at anytime *before* you locked it?”

“Well, there’s always noise outside when they’re leaving, you know. They got friends waiting for them, or else they go home together, you know, there’s always a lot of chatter when they go out.”

“But it was quiet when you locked the door.”

“Dead quiet,” the old man said.

The woman who took the chair beside Detective Meyer Meyer’s desk was perhaps thirty-two years old, with long straight black hair trailing down her back, and wide brown eyes that were terrified. It was still October, and the color of her tailored coat seemed suited to the season, a subtle tangerine with a small brown fur collar that echoed an outdoors trembling with the colors of autumn.

“I feel sort of silly about this,” she said, “but my husband insisted that I come.”

“I see,” Meyer said.

“There are ghosts,” the woman said.

Across the room, Kling unlocked the door to the detention cage and said, “Okay, pal, on your way. Try to stay sober till morning, huh?”

“It ain’t one-thirty yet,” the man said, “the night is young.” He stepped out of the cage, tipped his hat to Kling, and hurriedly left the squadroom.

Meyer looked at the woman sitting beside him, studying her with new interest because, to tell the truth, she had not seemed like a nut when she first walked into the squadroom. He had been a detective for more years than he chose to count, and in his time had met far too many nuts of every stripe and

persuasion. But he had never met one as pretty as Adele Gorman with her welltailored, fur-collared coat, and her Vassar voice, and her skillfully applied eye makeup, lips bare of color in her pale white face, pert and reasonably young and seemingly intelligent—but apparently a nut besides.

“In the house,” she said. “Ghosts.”

“Where do you live, Mrs. Gorman?” he asked. He had written her name on the pad in front of him, and now he watched her with his pencil poised and recalled the lady who had come into the squadroom only last month to report a gorilla peering into her bedroom from the fire escape outside. They had sent a patrolman over to make a routine check, and had even called the zoo and the circus (which was coincidentally in town, and which lent at least *some* measure of possibility to her claim), but there had been no ape on the fire escape, nor had any simians recently escaped from their cages. The lady came back the next day to report that her visiting gorilla had put in another appearance the night before, this time wearing a top hat and carrying a black cane with an ivory head. Meyer had assured her that he would have a platoon of cops watching her building that night, which seemed to calm her at least somewhat. He had then led her personally out of the squadroom, and down the iron-runged steps, and through the high-ceilinged muster room, and past the hanging green globes on the front stoop, and onto the sidewalk outside the station house. Sergeant Murchison, at the muster desk, shook his head after the lady was gone, and muttered, “More of them outside than in.”

Meyer watched Adele Gorman now, remembered what Murchison had said, and thought, *Gorilla in September, ghosts in October.*

“We live in Smoke Rise,” she said. “Actually, it’s my father’s house, but my husband and I are living there with him.”

“And the address?”

“374 MacArthur Lane. You take the first access road into Smoke Rise, about a mile and a half east of Silvermine Oval. The name on the mailbox is Van Houten. That’s my father’s name. Willer Van Houten.” She paused and studied him, as though expecting some reaction.

“Okay,” Meyer said, and ran a hand over his bald pate, and looked up, and said, “Now, you were saying, Mrs. Gorman...”

“That we have ghosts.”

“Um-huh. What kind of ghosts?”

“Ghosts. Poltergeists. Shades. I don’t know,” she said, and shrugged. “What kinds of ghosts are there?”

“Well, they’re *your* ghosts, so suppose you tell me,” Meyer said.

The telephone on Kling’s desk rang. He lifted the receiver and said, “87th Squad, Detective Kling.”

“There are two of them,” Adele said.

“Male or female?”

“One of each.”

“Yeah,” Kling said into the telephone, “go ahead.”

“How old would you say they were?”

“Centuries, I would guess.”

“No, I mean...”

“Oh, how old do they *look*? Well, the man...”

“You’ve *seen* them?”

“Oh, yes, many times.”

“Um-huh,” Meyer said.

“I’ll be right over,” Kling said into the telephone. “You stay there.” He slammed down the receiver, opened his desk drawer, pulled out a holstered revolver, and hurriedly clipped it to his belt.

“Somebody threw a bomb into a storefront church. 1733 Culver Avenue. I’m heading over.”

“Right,” Meyer said. “Get back to me.”

“We’ll need a couple of meat wagons. The minister and two other people were killed, and sounds as if there’re a lot of injured.”

“Will you tell Dave?”

“On the way out,” Kling said, and was gone.

“Mrs. Gorman,” Meyer said, “as you can see, we’re pretty busy here just now. I wonder if your ghosts can wait till morning.”

“No, they can’t,” Adele said.

“Why not?”

“Because they appear precisely at two forty-five A.M., and I want someone to see them.”

“Why don’t you and your husband look at them?” Meyer said.

“You think I’m a nut, don’t you?” Adele said.

“No, no, Mrs. Gorman, not at all.”

“Oh, yes you do,” Adele said. “I didn’t believe in ghosts, either, until I saw these two.”

“Well, this is all very interesting, I assure you, Mrs. Gorman, but really we do have our hands full right now, and I don’t know what we can do about these ghosts of yours, even if we did come over to take a look at them.”

“They’ve been stealing things from us,” Adele said, and Meyer thought, *Oh, we have given ourselves a prime lunatic this time.*

“What sort of things?”

“A diamond brooch that used to belong to my mother when she was alive. They stole that from my father’s safe.”

“What else?”

“A pair of emerald earrings. They were in the safe, too.”

“When did these thefts occur?”

“Last month.”

“Isn’t it possible the jewelry was mislaid someplace?”

“You don’t mislay a diamond brooch and a pair of emerald earrings that are locked inside a wall safe.”

“Did you report any of these thefts?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Because I knew you’d think I was crazy. Which is just what you’re thinking right this minute.”

“No, Mrs. Gorman, but I’m sure you can appreciate the fact that we, uh, can’t go around arresting ghosts,” Meyer said, and tried to smile.

Adele Gorman did not smile back. “Forget the ghosts,” she said. “I was foolish to mention them. I should have known better.” She took a deep breath, looked him squarely in the eye, and said, “I’m here to report the theft of a diamond brooch valued at six thousand dollars and a pair of earrings worth thirty-five hundred dollars. Will you send a man to investigate tonight, or should I ask my father to contact your superior officer?”

“Your father? What’s he got to...?”

“My father is a retired Surrogate’s Court judge,” Adele said.

“I see.”

“Yes, I hope you do.”

“What time did you say these ghosts arrive?” Meyer asked, and sighed heavily.

Between midnight and 2:00, the city does not change very much. The theaters have all let out, and the average Saturday night revelers, good citizens from Bethtown or Calm's Point, Riverhead or Majesta, have come into the Isola streets again in search of a snack or a giggle before heading home to their separate beds. The city is an ants' nest of after-theater eateries ranging from chic French cafés and pizzerias to luncheonettes to coffee shops to hot dog stands to delicatessens, all of them packed to the ceilings because Saturday night is not only the loneliest night of the week, it is also the night to howl. And howl they do, these good burghers who have put in five long hard days of labor and who are now anxious to relax and enjoy themselves before Sunday arrives, bringing with it the attendant boredom of too damn much leisure time, anathema for the American male. The crowds shove and jostle their way along The Stem, moving in and out of bowling alleys, shooting galleries, penny arcades, strip joints, nightclubs, jazz emporiums, souvenir shops, lining the sidewalks outside plateglass windows in which go-go girls gyrate, or watching with fascination as a roast beef slowly turns on a spit. Saturday night is a time for pleasure, and even the singles can find satisfaction, briefly courted by the sidewalk whores standing outside the shabby hotels in the side streets off The Stem, searching out homosexuals in gay bars on the city's notorious North Side or down in The Quarter, thumbing through dirty books in the myriad "back magazine" shops, or slipping into darkened screening rooms to watch 16mm films of girls taking off their clothes, good people all or most, with nothing more on their minds than a little fun, a little enjoyment of the short respite between Friday night at 5:00 and Monday morning at 9:00.

But along around 2:00 A.M., the city begins to change.

The citizens have waited to get their cars out of parking garages (more damn garages than there are barbershops) or have staggered their way sleepily into subways to make the long trip back to the outlying sections, the furry toy dog won in the Pokerino palace clutched limply in arms that may or may not later succumb to less than ardent embrace, the laughter a bit thin, the voice a bit croaked, a college song being sung on a rattling subway car, but without much force or spirit, Saturday night has ended, it is really Sunday morning already, the morning hours are truly upon the city now, and the denizens appear.

The hookers brazenly approach any straying male, never mind the "Want to have a good time with your sweetheart?", never mind the euphemisms now. Now it's "Want to fuck, honey?", yes or no, a quick sidewalk transaction and the attendant danger of later getting mugged and rolled or maybe killed by a pimp in a hotel room stinking of Lysol while your pants are draped over a wooden chair. The junkies are out in force, too, looking for cars foolishly left unlocked and parked on the streets, or—lacking such fortuitous circumstance—experienced enough to force the side vent with a screwdriver, hook the lock button with a wire hanger, and open the door that way. There are pushers peddling their dreary stuff, from pot to hoss to speed, a nickel bag or a twenty-dollar deck; fences hawking their stolen goodies, anything from a transistor radio to a refrigerator, the biggest bargain basement in town; burglars jimmying windows or forcing doors with a Celluloid strip, this being an excellent hour to break into apartments, when the occupants are asleep and the street sounds are hushed. But worse than any of these people (for they are, after all, only citizens engaged in commerce of a sort) are the predators who roam the night in search of trouble. In cruising wedges of three or four, sometimes high but more often not, they look for victims—a taxicab driver coming out of a cafeteria, an old woman poking around garbage cans for hidden treasures, a teenage couple necking in a parked automobile, it doesn't matter. You can get killed in this city at any time of the day or night, but your chances for extinction are best after 2:00 A.M. because, paradoxically, the night people take over in the morning. There are neighborhoods that terrify even cops in this lunar landscape, and certain places they will not enter unless they have first checked to see that there are two doors, one to get in by, and the other to get out through, fast, should someone decide to block the exit from behind.

The Painted Parasol was just such an establishment.

~~They had found in Mercy Howell's appointment book a notation that read, "Harry, 2 A.M., The Painted Parasol,"~~ and since they knew this particular joint for exactly the kind of hole it was, and since they wondered what connection the slain girl might have had with the various unappetizing types who frequented the place from dusk till dawn, they decided to hit it and find out. The front entrance opened on a long flight of stairs that led down to the main room of what was not a restaurant, and not a club, though it combined features of both. It did not possess a liquor license, and so it served only coffee and sandwiches, but occasionally a rock singer would plug in his amplifier and guitar and whack out a few numbers for the patrons. The back door of the—hangout?—opened onto a side-street alley. Hawes checked it out, reported back to Carella, and they both made a mental floor plan in case they needed it later.

Carella went down the long flight of steps first, Hawes immediately behind him. At the bottom of the stairway, they moved through a beaded curtain and found themselves in a large room overhung with an old Air Force parachute painted in a wild psychedelic pattern. A counter upon which rested a coffee urn and trays of sandwiches in Saran Wrap was just opposite the hanging beaded curtain. To the left and right of the counter were perhaps two dozen tables, all of them occupied. A waitress in a black leotard and black high-heeled patent leather pumps was swiveling among and around the tables, taking orders. There was a buzz of conversation in the room, hovering, captured in the folds of the brightly painted parachute. Behind the counter, a man in a white apron was drawing a cup of coffee from the huge silver urn. Carella and Hawes walked over to him. Carella was almost six feet tall, and he weighed 180 pounds, with wide shoulders and a narrow waist and the hands of a street brawler. Hawes was six feet two inches tall, and he weighed 195 pounds bone-dry, and his hair was a fiery red with a white streak over the left temple, where he had once been knifed while investigating a burglary. Both men looked like exactly what they were: fuzz.

"What's the trouble?" the man behind the counter asked immediately.

"No trouble," Carella said. "This your place?"

"Yeah. My name is Georgie Bright, and I already been visited, thanks. Twice."

"Oh? Who visited you?"

"First time a cop named O'Brien, second time a cop named Parker. I already cleared up the whole thing that was going on downstairs."

"What whole thing going on downstairs?"

"In the men's room. Some kids were selling pot down there, it got to be a regular neighborhood supermarket. So I done what O'Brien suggested, I put a man down there outside the toilet door, and the rule now is only one person goes in there at a time. Parker came around to make sure I was keeping my part of the bargain. I don't want no narcotics trouble here. Go down and take a look if you like. You'll see I got a man watching the toilet."

"Who's watching the man watching the toilet?" Carella asked.

"That ain't funny," Georgie Bright said, looking offended.

"Know anybody named Harry?" Hawes asked.

"Harry who? I know a lot of Harrys."

"Any of them here tonight?"

"Maybe."

"Where?"

"There's one over there near the bandstand. The big guy with the blond hair."

"Harry what?"

"Donatello."

"Make the name?" Carella asked Hawes.

“No,” Hawes said.

“Neither do I.”

“Let’s talk to him.”

“You want a cup of coffee or something?” Georgie Bright asked.

“Yeah, why don’t you send some over to the table?” Hawes said, and followed Carella across the room to where Harry Donatello was sitting with another man. Donatello was wearing gray slacks, black shoes and socks, a white shirt open at the throat, and a double-breasted blue blazer. His long blond hair was combed straight back from the forehead, revealing a sharply defined widow’s peak. He was easily as big as Hawes, and he sat with his hands folded on the table in front of him, talking to the man who sat opposite him. He did not look up as the detectives approached.

“Is your name Harry Donatello?” Carella asked.

“Who wants to know?”

“Police officers,” Carella said, and flashed his shield.

“I’m Harry Donatello, what’s the matter?”

“Mind if we sit down?” Hawes asked, and before Donatello could answer, both men sat, their backs to the empty bandstand and the exit door.

“Do you know a girl named Mercy Howell?” Carella asked.

“What about her?”

“Do you know her?”

“I know her. What’s the beef? She underage or something?”

“When did you see her last?”

The man with Donatello, who up to now had been silent, suddenly piped, “You don’t have to answer no questions without a lawyer, Harry. Tell them you want a lawyer.”

The detectives looked him over. He was small and thin, with black hair combed sideways to conceal a receding hairline. He was badly in need of a shave. He was wearing blue trousers and a striped shirt.

“This is a field investigation,” Hawes said drily, “and we can ask anything we damn please.”

“Town’s getting full of lawyers,” Carella said. “What’s *your* name, counselor?”

“Jerry Riggs. You going to drag *me* in this, whatever it is?”

“It’s a few friendly questions in the middle of the night,” Hawes said. “Anybody got any objections to that?”

“Getting so two guys can’t even sit and talk together without getting shook down,” Riggs said.

“You’ve got a rough life, all right,” Hawes said, and the girl in the black leotard brought the coffee to the table and then hurried off to take another order. Donatello watched her jiggling behind her as she swiveled across the room.

“So when’s the last time you saw the Howell girl?” Carella asked again.

“Wednesday night,” Donatello said.

“Did you see her tonight?”

“No.”

“Were you *supposed* to see her tonight?”

“Where’d you get that idea?”

“We’re full of ideas,” Hawes said.

“Yeah, I was supposed to meet her here ten minutes ago. Dumb broad is late, as usual.”

“What do you do for a living, Donatello?”

“I’m an importer. You want to see my business card?”

“What do you import?”

“Souvenir ashtrays.”

“How’d you get to know Mercy Howell?”

~~“I met her at a party in The Quarter. She got a little high, and she done her thing.”~~

“What thing?”

“The thing she does in that show she’s in.”

“Which is what?”

“She done this dance where she takes off all her clothes.”

“How long have you been seeing her?”

“I met her a couple of months ago. I see her on and off, maybe once a week, something like that. This town is full of broads, you know, a guy don’t have to get himself involved in no relationship with no specific broad.”

“What was your relationship with *this* specific broad?”

“We have a few laughs together, that’s all. She’s a swinger, little Mercy,” Donatello said, and grinned at Riggs.

“Want to tell us where you were tonight between eleven and twelve?”

“Is this still *afield* investigation?” Riggs asked sarcastically.

“Nobody’s in custody yet,” Hawes said, “so let’s cut the legal crap, okay? Tell us where you were, Donatello.”

“Right here,” Donatello said. “From ten o’clock till now.”

“I suppose somebody saw you here during that time.”

“A *hundred* people saw me.”

A crowd of angry black men and women were standing outside the shattered window of the storefront church. Two fire engines and an ambulance were parked at the curb. Kling pulled in behind the second engine, some ten feet away from the hydrant. It was almost 2:30 A.M. on a bitterly cold October night, but the crowd looked and sounded like a mob at an afternoon street-corner rally in the middle of August. Restless, noisy, abrasive, anticipative, they ignored the penetrating cold and concentrated instead on the burning issue of the hour, the fact that a person or persons unknown had thrown a bomb through the plateglass window of the church. The beat patrolman, a newly appointed cop who felt vaguely uneasy in this neighborhood even during his daytime shift, greeted Kling effusively, his pale-white face bracketed by earmuffs, his gloved hands clinging desperately to his nightstick. The crowd parted to let Kling through. It did not help that he was the youngest man on the squad, with the callow look of a country bumpkin on his unlined face, it did not help that he was blond and hatless, it did not help that he walked into the church with the confident youthful stride of a champion come to set things right. The crowd knew he was fuzz, and they knew he was whitey, and they knew, too, that if this bombing had taken place on Hall Avenue crosstown and downtown, the police commissioner himself would have arrived behind a herald of official trumpets. This, however, was Culver Avenue, where a boiling mixture of Puerto Ricans and Negroes shared a disintegrating ghetto, and so the car that pulled to the curb was not marked with the commissioner’s distinctive blue and-gold seal, but was instead a green Chevy convertible that belonged to Kling himself, and the man who stepped out of it looked young and inexperienced and inept despite the confident stride he affected as he walked into the church, his shield pinned to his overcoat.

The bomb had caused little fire damage, and the firemen already had the flames under control, their hoses snaking through and around the overturned folding chairs scattered about the small room. Ambulance attendants picked their way over the hoses and around the debris, carrying out the injured—the dead could wait.

“Have you called the Bomb Squad?” Kling asked the patrolman.

“No,” the patrolman answered, shaken by the sudden possibility that he had been derelict in his

duty.

“Why don’t you do that now?” Kling suggested.

“Yes, sir,” the patrolman answered, and rushed out. The ambulance attendants went by with a moaning woman on a stretcher. She was still wearing her eyeglasses, but one lens had been shattered and blood was running in a steady rivulet down the side of her nose. The place stank of gunpowder and smoke and charred wood. The most serious damage had been done at the rear of the small store, farthest away from the entrance door. Whoever had thrown the bomb must have possessed a damn good pitching arm to have hurled it so accurately through the window and across the fifteen feet to the makeshift altar. The minister lay across his own altar, dead, one arm blown off in the explosion. Two women who had been sitting on folding chairs closest to the altar lay upon each other on the floor now, tangled in death, their clothes still smoldering. The sounds of the injured filled the room and then were suffocated by the overriding siren-shriek of the arriving second ambulance. Kling went outside to the crowd.

“Anybody here witness this?” he asked.

A young man, black, wearing a beard and a natural hair style, turned away from a group of other youths and walked directly to Kling.

“Is the minister dead?” he asked.

“Yes, he is,” Kling answered.

“Who else?”

“Two women.”

“Who?”

“I don’t know yet. We’ll identify them as soon as the men are through in there.” He turned again to the crowd. “Did anybody see what happened?” he asked.

“I saw it,” the young man said.

“What’s your name, son?”

“Andrew Jordan.”

Kling took out his pad. “All right, let’s have it.”

“What good’s this going to do?” Jordan asked. “Writing all this shit in your book?”

“You said you saw what...”

“I saw it, all right. I was walking by, heading for the poolroom up the street, and the ladies were inside singing, and this car pulled up, and a guy got out, threw the bomb, and ran back to the car.”

“What kind of a car was it?”

“A red VW.”

“What year?”

“Who can tell with those VWs?”

“How many people in it?”

“Two. The driver and the guy who threw the bomb.”

“Notice the license plate?”

“No. They drove off too fast.”

“Can you describe the man who threw the bomb?”

“Yeah. He was white.”

“What else?” Kling asked.

“That’s all,” Jordan replied. “He was *whiter*.”

There were perhaps three dozen estates in all of Smoke Rise, a hundred or so people living in luxurious near seclusion on acres of valuable land through which ran four winding, interconnected private roadways. Meyer Meyer drove between the wide stone pillars marking Smoke Rise’s western

access road, entering a city within a city, bounded on the north by the River Harb, shielded from the River Highway by stands of poplars and evergreens on the south—exclusive Smoke Rise, known familiarly and derisively to the rest of the city’s inhabitants as “The Club.”

374 MacArthur Lane was at the end of the road that curved past the Hamilton Bridge. The house was a huge gray stone structure with a slate roof and scores of gables and chimneys jostling the sky, perched high in gloomy shadow above the Harb. As he stepped from the car, Meyer could hear the sounds of river traffic, the hooting of tugs, the blowing of whistles, the eruption of a squawk box on a destroyer midstream. He looked out over the water. Reflected lights glistened in shimmering liquid beauty, the hanging globes on the bridge’s suspension cables, the dazzling reds and greens of signal lights on the opposite shore, single illuminated window slashes in apartment buildings throwing their mirror images onto the black surface of the river, the blinking wing lights of an airplane overhead moving in watery reflection like a submarine. The air was cold, a fine piercing drizzle had begun several minutes ago. Meyer shuddered, pulled the collar of his coat higher on his neck, and walked toward the old gray house, his shoes crunching on the driveway gravel, the sound echoing away into the high surrounding bushes.

The stones of the old house oozed wetness. Thick vines covered the walls, climbing to the gable-turreted roof. He found a doorbell set over a brass escutcheon in the thick oaken doorjamb and pressed it. Chimes sounded somewhere deep inside the house. He waited.

The door opened suddenly.

The man looking out at him was perhaps seventy years old, with piercing blue eyes, bald except for white thatches of hair that sprang wildly from behind each ear. He wore a red smoking jacket and black trousers, a black ascot around his neck, red velvet slippers.

“What do you want?” he asked immediately.

“I’m Detective Meyer of the 87th—”

“Who sent for you?”

“A woman named Adele Gorman came to the—”

“My daughter’s a fool,” the man said. “We don’t need the police here,” and slammed the door in his face.

Meyer stood on the doorstep feeling somewhat like a horse’s ass. A tugboat hooted on the river. A light snapped on upstairs, casting an amber rectangle into the dark driveway. He looked at the luminous dial of his watch. It was 2:35 A.M. The drizzle was cold and penetrating. He took out his handkerchief, blew his nose, and wondered what he should do next. He did not like ghosts, and he did not like lunatics, and he did not like nasty old men who did not comb their hair and who slammed doors in a person’s face. He was about to head back for his car when the door opened again.

“Detective Meyer?” Adele Gorman said. “Do come in.”

“Thank you,” he said, and stepped into the entrance foyer.

“You’re right on time.”

“Well, a little early actually,” Meyer said. He still felt foolish. What the hell was he doing investigating ghosts in the middle of the night?

“This way,” Adele said, and he followed her through a somberly paneled foyer into a vast, dimly lit living room. Heavy oaken beams ran overhead, velvet draperies hung at the window, the room was cluttered with ponderous old furniture. He could believe there were ghosts in this house, he could suddenly believe it. A young man wearing dark glasses rose like a specter from the sofa near the fireplace. His face, illuminated by the single standing floor lamp, looked wan and drawn. Wearing a black cardigan sweater over a white shirt and dark slacks, he approached Meyer unsmilingly with his hand extended—but he did not accept Meyer’s hand when it was offered in return.

Meyer suddenly realized that the man was blind.

"I'm Ralph Gorman," he said, his hand still extended. "Adele's husband."

~~"How do you do, Mr. Gorman," Meyer said, and took his hand. The palm was moist and cold.~~

"It was good of you to come," Gorman said. "These apparitions have been driving us crazy."

"What time is it?" Adele asked suddenly, and looked at her watch. "We've got five minutes," she said. There was a tremor in her voice. She seemed suddenly very frightened.

"Won't your father be here?" Meyer asked.

"No, he's gone up to bed," Adele said. "I'm afraid he's bored with the whole affair and terribly angry that we notified the police."

Meyer made no comment. Had he known that Willem Van Houten, former Surrogate's Court judge, had *not* wanted the police to be notified, Meyer would not have been here in the first place. He debated leaving now, but Adele Gorman had begun talking again, and it was impolite to depart in the middle of another person's sentence.

"...is in her early thirties, I would guess. The other ghost, the male, is about your age—forty or forty-five, something like that."

"I'm thirty-seven," Meyer said.

"Oh."

"The bald head fools a lot of people."

"Yes."

"I was bald at a very early age."

"Anyway," Adele said, "their names are Elisabeth and Johann, and they've probably been—"

"Oh, they have names, do they?"

"Yes. They're ancestors, you know. My father is Dutch, and there actually *were* an Elisabeth and Johann Van Houten in the family centuries ago, when Smoke Rise was still a Dutch settlement."

"They're Dutch, um-huh, I see," Meyer said.

"Yes. They always appear wearing Dutch costumes. And they also speak Dutch."

"Have *you* heard them, Mr. Gorman?"

"Yes," Gorman said. "I'm blind, you know..." he added, and hesitated, as though expecting some comment from Meyer. When none came, he said, "But I *have* heard them."

"Do you speak Dutch?"

"No. My father-in-law speaks it fluently, though, and he identified the language for us and told us what they were saying."

"What *did* they say?"

"Well, for one thing, they said they were going to steal Adele's jewelry, and they damn well did."

"Your *wife's* jewelry? But I thought—"

"It was willed to her by her mother. My father-in-law keeps it in his safe."

"*Kept*, you mean."

"No, keeps. There are several pieces in addition to the ones that were stolen. Two rings and also a necklace."

"And the value?"

"Altogether? I would say about forty thousand dollars."

"Your ghosts have expensive taste."

The floor lamp in the room suddenly began to flicker. Meyer glanced at it and felt the hackles rising at the back of his neck.

"The lights are going out, Ralph," Adele whispered.

"Is it two forty-five?"

"Yes."

"They're here," Gorman whispered.

~~Mercy Howell's roommate had been asleep for close to four hours when they knocked on her door. But she was a wily young lady, hip to the ways of the big city, and very much awake as she conducted her own little investigation without so much as opening the door a crack. First she asked them to spell their names slowly. Then she asked them their shield numbers. Then she asked them to hold their shields and their ID cards close to the door's peephole, where she could see them. Still unconvinced, she said through the locked door, "You just wait there a minute." They waited for close to five minutes before they heard her approaching the door again. The heavy steel bar of a Fox lock was pushed noisily to the side, a safety chain rattled on its track, the tumblers of one lock clicked open, and then another, and finally the girl opened the door.~~

"Come in," she said, "I'm sorry I kept you waiting. I called the station house and they said you were okay."

"You're a very careful girl," Hawes said.

"At this hour of the morning? Are you kidding?" she said.

She was perhaps twenty-five, with her red hair up in curlers, her face cold-creamed clean makeup. She was wearing a pink quilted robe over flannel pajamas, and although she was probably a very pretty girl at 9:00 A.M., she now looked about as attractive as a Buffalo nickel.

"What's your name, miss?" Carella asked.

"Lois Kaplan. What's this all about? Has there been another burglary in the building?"

"No, Miss Kaplan. We want to ask you some questions about Mercy Howell? Did she live here with you?"

"Yes," Lois said, and suddenly looked at them shrewdly. "What do you mean *did*? She still *does*."

They were standing in the small foyer of the apartment, and the foyer went so still that all the night sounds of the building were clearly audible all at once, as though they had not been there before but had only been summoned up now to fill the void of silence. A toilet flushed somewhere, a hot water pipe rattled, a baby whimpered, a dog barked, someone dropped a shoe. In the foyer now filled with noise, they stared at each other wordlessly, and finally Carella drew a deep breath and said, "Your roommate is dead. She was stabbed tonight as she was leaving the theater."

"No," Lois said, simply and flatly and unequivocally. "No, she isn't."

"Miss Kaplan..."

"I don't give a damn what you say, Mercy isn't dead."

"Miss Kaplan, she's dead."

"Oh Jesus," Lois said, and burst into tears, "oh Jesus, oh damn damn, oh Jesus."

The two men stood by feeling stupid and big and awkward and helpless. Lois Kaplan covered her face with her hands and sobbed into them, her shoulders heaving, saying over and over again, "I'm sorry, oh Jesus, please, I'm sorry, please, oh poor Mercy, oh my God," while the detectives tried not to watch. At last the crying stopped and she looked up at them with eyes that had been knifed and said softly, "Come in. Please," and led them into the living room. She kept staring at the floor as she talked. It was as if she could not look them in the face, not these men who had brought her the news.

"Do you know who did it?" she asked.

"No. Not yet."

"We wouldn't have waked you in the middle of the night—"

"That's all right."

"But very often, if we get moving on a case fast enough, before the trail gets cold—"

"Yes, I understand."

"We can often—"

"Yes, before the trail gets cold," Lois said.

“Yes.”

The apartment went silent again.

“Would you know if Miss Howell had any enemies?” Carella asked.

“She was the sweetest girl in the world,” Lois said.

“Did she argue with anyone recently, were there—”

“No.”

“Any threatening telephone calls or letters?” Lois Kaplan looked up at them.

“Yes,” she said. “A letter.”

“A *threatening* letter?”

“We couldn’t tell. It frightened Mercy, though. That’s why she bought the gun.”

“What kind of gun?”

“I don’t know. A small one.”

“Would it have been a .25-caliber Browning?”

“I don’t know guns.”

“Was this letter mailed to her or delivered personally?”

“It was mailed to her. At the theater.”

“When?”

“A week ago.”

“Did she report it to the police?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Haven’t you seen *Rattlesnake*?” Lois said.

“What do you mean?” Carella said.

“*Rattlesnake*. The musical. Mercy’s show. The show she was in.”

“No, I haven’t.”

“But you’ve *heard* of it.”

“No.”

“Where do you live, for God’s sake? On the moon?”

“I’m sorry, I just haven’t—”

“Forgive me,” Lois said immediately. “I’m not usually...I’m trying very hard to...I’m sorry.”

Forgive me.”

“That’s all right,” Carella said.

“Anyway, it’s...it’s a big hit now but...There was trouble in the beginning, you see...Are you

sure you don’t know about this? It was in all the newspapers.”

“Well, I guess I missed it,” Carella said. “What was the trouble about?”

“Don’t *you* know about this, either?” she asked Hawes.

“No, I’m sorry.”

“About Mercy’s dance?”

“No.”

“Well, in one scene, Mercy danced the title song without any clothes on. Because the idea was to

express...the *hell* with what the idea was. The point is that the dance wasn’t at all prurient, it wasn’t

even sexy! But the police *missed* the point and closed the show down two days after it opened. The

producers had to go to court for a writ to get the show opened again.”

“Yes, I remember it now,” Carella said.

“What I’m trying to say is that nobody involved with *Rattlesnake* would report *anything* to the

police. Not even a threatening letter.”

“If she bought a pistol,” Hawes said, “she would have *had* to go to the police. For a permit.”

“She didn’t have a permit.”

“Then how’d she get the pistol? You can’t buy a handgun without first—”

“A friend of hers sold it to her.”

“What’s the friend’s name?”

“Harry Donatello.”

“An importer,” Carella said drily.

“Of souvenir ashtrays,” Hawes said.

“I don’t know what he does for a living,” Lois said. “But he got the gun for her.”

“When was this?”

“A few days after she received the letter.”

“What did the letter say?” Carella asked.

“I’ll get it for you,” Lois said, and went into the bedroom. They heard a dresser drawer opening, the rustle of clothes, what might have been a tin candy box being opened. Lois came back into the room. “Here it is,” she said.

There didn’t seem much point in trying to preserve latent prints on a letter that had already been handled by Mercy Howell, Lois Kaplan, and God knew how many others. But Carella nonetheless accepted the letter on a handkerchief spread over the palm of his hand and then looked at the face of the envelope. “She should have brought this to us immediately,” he said. “It’s written on hot stationery, we’ve got an address without lifting a finger.”

The letter had indeed been written on stationery from The Addison Hotel, one of the city’s lesser-known fleabags, some two blocks north of the Eleventh Street Theater, where Mercy Howell had worked. There was a single sheet of paper in the envelope. Carella unfolded it. Lettered in pencil were the words:

PUT ON YOUR
CLOSE, MISS!
The Avenging Angel

The lamp went out, the room was black.

At first there was no sound but the sharp intake of Adele Gorman’s breath. And then, indistinctly, as faintly as though carried on a swirling mist that blew in wetly from some desolated shore, there came the sound of garbled voices, and the room grew suddenly cold. The voices were those of a crowd in endless debate, rising and falling in cacophonous cadence, a mixture of tongues that rattled and rasped. There was the sound, too, of a rising wind, as though a door to some forbidden landscape had

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