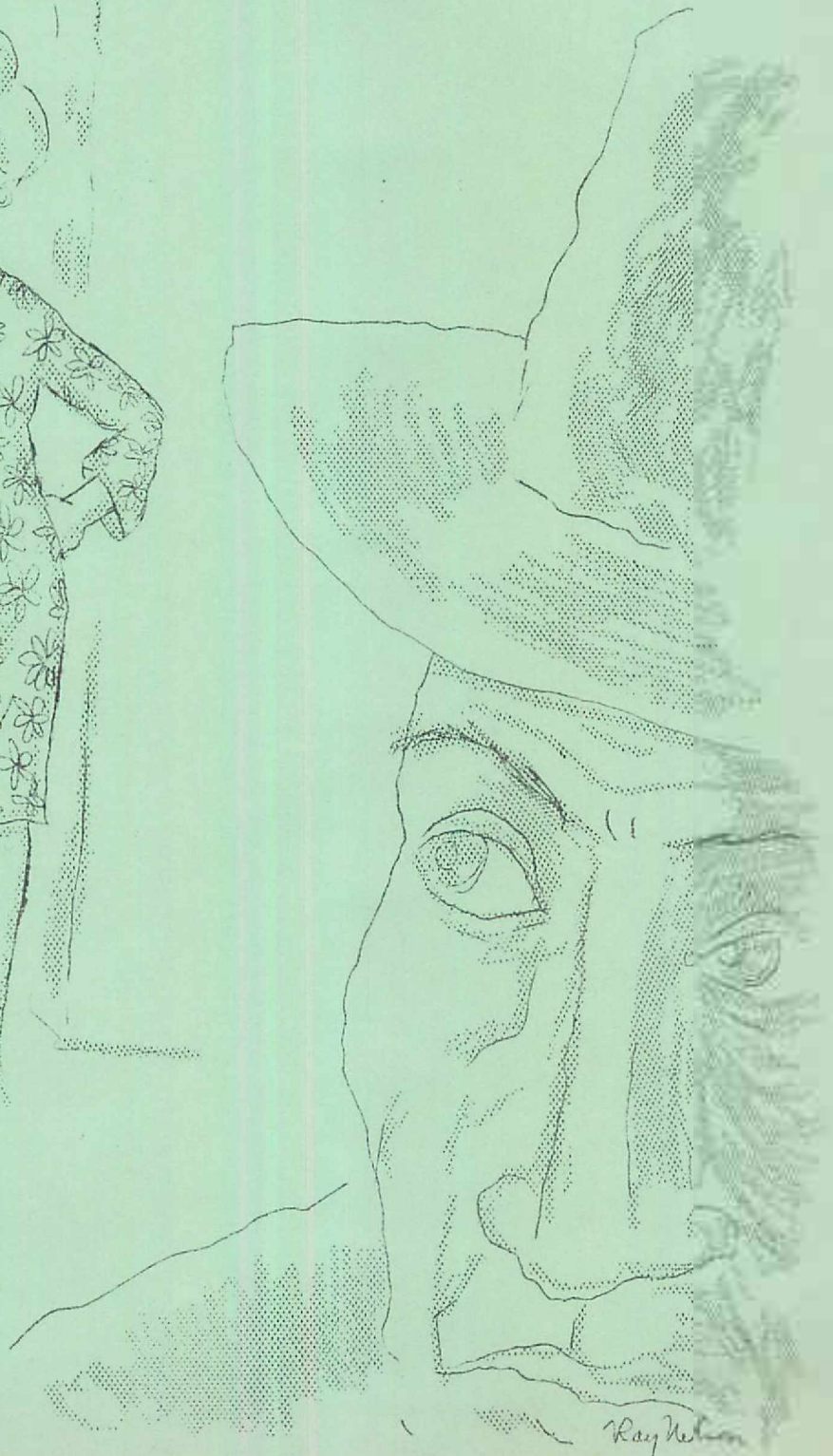
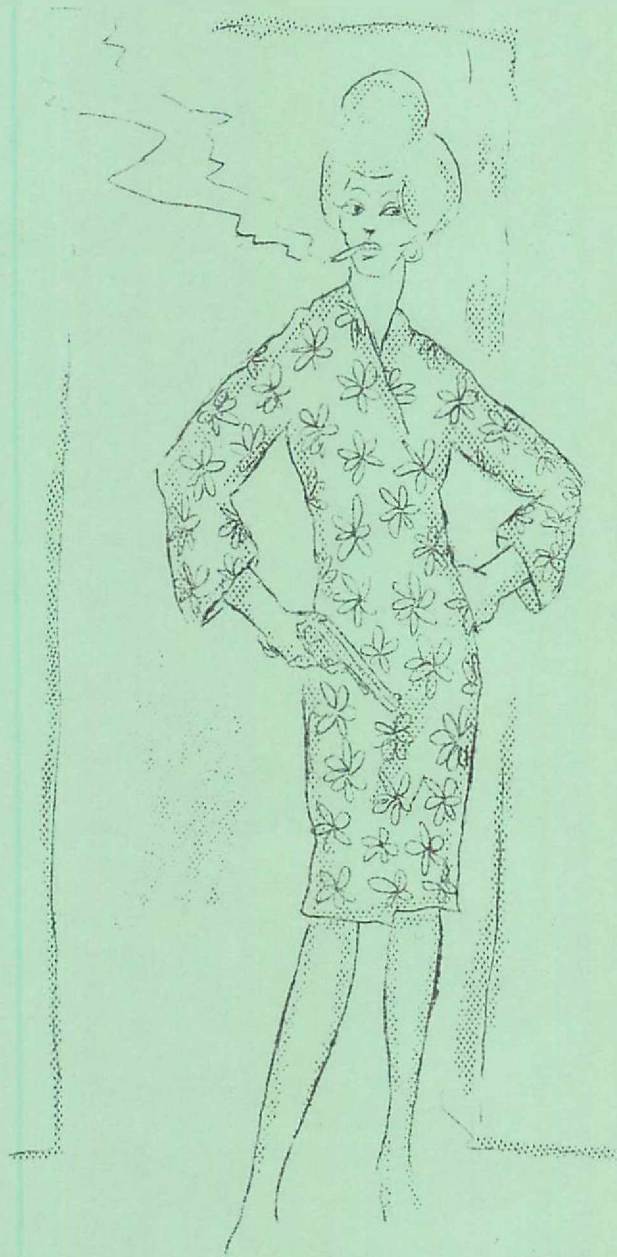


crime stalks the fan world

BY F. LEE BALDWIN



ENTROPY
BOOKLET
NUMBER ONE

Ray Nelson

CRIME STALKS THE FAN WORLD

by
F. LEE BALDWIN

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INTRODUCTION by bob tucker

Franklin Lee Baldwin was an enthusiastic but unspectacular member of Eofandom: one of that rare breed of cat who was reading and collecting copies of Amazing Stories and Weird Tales in 1926. Because his tastes ran more to fantasy than to science fiction, he was also one of the not-so-rare breed who struck up a correspondence with H. P. Lovecraft, about 1931, and maintained that contact until the author's death in 1937. So close were the emotional ties that the shock of HPL's death caused Baldwin to withdraw from fandom (for the first time) shortly thereafter. He stayed away for nearly six years.

Lee was born on March 26, 1913, and spent his childhood in Asotin, Washington. In later years he was in Grangeville, Idaho, where he inhabited one of those ubiquitous postal boxes and where he eventually met Francis T. Laney. In the early 1930's he contributed regularly to the leading fanzines of the day, SCIENCE FICTION DIGEST, FANTASY MAGAZINE, and THE FANTASY FAN. I am not now familiar with his work in the first two named, but in Hornig's FANTASY FAN he offered columns of news and comment entitled Side Glances and Within the Circle, columns dealing chiefly with the fantasy and weird aspects of our sub-literature. Because he was unspectacular, he did not achieve the notoriety garnered by some of his contemporaries.

Although he was not the prime mover, he was one of the charter members of Chapter 2, The Science Fiction League, which was quickly organized in Lewiston, Idaho -- the ink was barely dry on the May 1934 Wonder Stories, that issue which carried the announcement of Uncle Hugo's brainchild. Regarding those lean times, Laney said of him: "...he was studying piano, and supported himself for several years during the mid-thirties playing in dance bands and taverns all through the Pacific Northwest. He is one of the three best white boogie-woogie men I have ever heard..."

Laney and his fantasy fanzine, THE ACOLYTE, coaxed Lee from hiding in 1942, and he re-entered fandom only slightly changed. He now earned a living as a foreman in an Idaho bakery. Laney said he worked generously in the production of THE ACOLYTE and, presumably trading on his old contacts, brought to the fanzine such authors as Derleth and the Wandrei brothers. His early column Within the Circle was also revived there. Laney described him thusly: "In physical appearance, he is short and slender, with pale complexion and dark wavy hair, and has the slender sort of good looks one is wont to associate with Poe's heroes. Upon meeting him, one is immediately struck by his sharply inquisitive eyes, his rapid-fire conversation, and his dapper vivacity."

In this return to fandom, Lee also fell into his old and evil habits: contributing to fan magazines. Together in 1945 he and I published THE FANTASY FAN INDEX, a labor of love in memory of a still earlier love; and he appeared in SHANGRI-L'AFFAIRES with fan fiction truly worthy of the name. This last revealed another Baldwin facet.

Crime Stalks the Fan World and The Girl With the Muddy Eyes both offer clear evidence that Lee was a reader of detective fiction, or at least possessed more than a passing acquaintance with a certain type of crime novel in vogue twenty years ago. Both stories are parodies of the now nearly-discredited tough guy detective, the

private-eye who is little more than a gin-swilling, skirt-chasing roughneck, a man who only incidentally solves a crime in the course of the narrative to justify calling it a whodunnit. Some readers were already beginning to tire of this private-eye, and some writers were already offering parodies, as long as twenty years ago -- as Lee did. In later times, of course, Mickey Spillane fired his gun into a woman's belly and published the greatest parody of them all -- under the belief that he was publishing a serious, straightforward story.

Lee Baldwin was there ahead of him, but Lee knew what he was doing.



CRIME STALKS THE FAN WORLD



Some call me a gun-shoe, but I let it pass. I do, however, operate the Shamrock Agency. No glamorous jessie answers my phone or tells a prospect that I'm in conference or opens my bills. I run the Agency without that detective writer's frill. It's damn lonesome, too. But the gray dampish walls of my cheap office room would be depressing for some slick frail, and besides I can't afford rye for two, let alone after-hour dinners.

I had to go to Croyford on Saturday but because of two bits of mail I locked up the dump on Wednesday and went ahead of schedule. Number One piece of mail was an issue of FANEWSCARD and a paragraph said: "Old time fan Pat McGoy returns to activity after 7 yr absence. Now living at coastal pueblo of Croyford. Welcome back, Pat." It gave his address.

Number Two was a third-class circular from Pat himself. He had something to sell. It said that due to an accident which had resulted in the amputation of both arms he was forced to sell his collection of autographed fantasy and science-fiction to help defray the cost of medical aid. It was touching, a pity-garnering thing. The stuff he had on offer was excerpts from magazines between twelve and twenty years old, each with the author's John Hancock. He must have put out a lot of effort and postage and bothered a lot of hack writers getting such a mess of stuff. Anyhow, now he wanted to peddle it, and, indeed, it was an imposing array of "names" he had. Clark Ashton Smith, Lovecraft, Merritt, Howard, Wells, Burroughs. All them guys. Enough to make a tyro's mouth water.

I've been a fan since I was a kid in knee pants and the name of McGoy was familiar enough to me. But like a lot of others he had dropped out as he grew older. The name Pat McGoy, in later years, had a familiar ring to it too. So that

Wednesday afternoon I went down and thumbed through the morgue at the Free Press office. My tank was plenty refreshed anent the McGoy when I left. It was Pat McGoy who was gungel for the Marara-Cillio gambling syndicate. The clippings said nothing, though, about his having met with any accident.

Hell, Croyford's only seventy-five miles or so up the Coast from here, so I grabbed the five-forty bus.

He had a suite at the Benchley. The clerk said he was in so I rode the express to the 20th and catted down the hall to his door. It was closed but the damn fool had forgotten to lock it. Anyhow, I was in the room watching interestedly before he saw me. That is, before the broad saw me. She saw me first. I got a good gander at her, too. Her legs, what I saw of them, were long, very shapely and very white. She had indigo sloe-eyes and her matching velvet dress was wadded up around her flat little tummy. That's all she had on, I'm sure. The McGoy was making with the mush, but in earnest. His sleeves had a couple of good, healthy arms in them. His back was to me and when she pushed him away he misinterpreted the action and cuffed her along the jaw. He said, "What the hell's the matta, b..."

Then he got the drift.

He turned. He was in his shirt sleeves, shoulder holster unbuckled loosely. When he saw me he went for his rod.

I said, "If you're Pat McGoy, put that thing away. This is a friendly call. Name of Boyle." I stuck out my mit. "I'm a fan and I thought I'd drop over and see what you had for sale. The line-up sounded good."

His eyes got pleasant and he clasped my hand. He said, "Sure, sure, I remember you. You used to write a column in ASTROVOX. Sure, sure, but you've changed a lot from them early pix. Christ, I thought you was a shamus at first. You look like one; no offense." He grimaced in an effort to be cordial.

I released his paw and as he drew it back his brown eyes clouded and his craggy face crimsoned from his collar up. I thought I was going to have to bat him one, but he swallowed his embarrassment. He shrugged his heavy shoulders. "Just a gag, just a gag. Come on, and I'll show you the stuff." He laughed down in his chest and motioned with his head to follow as he took off toward a doorway across the room. I let the arm deal pass.

The indigo dame gave me a breathtaking leer. She was taking her time arranging herself. When she had it smoothed out the velvet fit her like a skin.

The room was a bedroom, nicely furnished but untidy as hell. Piles of magazines littered the place. The corner to which he led me had a semblance of neatness and what he had piled here and there was crisscrossed and labeled "HPL" or "Two-Gun" or whatever the piles happened to be.

There must have been a hundred items or more in each. He motioned with his head, saying, "This is the stuff. Personally autographed by the author -- five skins per, and that's plenty cheap in these times." He picked one at random off the Lovecraft stack. I easily recognized the minute scrawl of Howard Phillips. The yarn was "The Rats in the Walls" from a pre-1930 Weird Tales. I put it back and scanned through the others within reach. McGoy watched my face, his own impassive. He was a heavy-set little gee and his shoulder muscles seemed to be bunched whatever his stance. The forty-five he packed looked plenty aggressive.

"Brother, these are plenty sweet," I said, and gave him what I hoped was an

envious smirk. I didn't want to buy as I was not at the time adding to my own collection. It was good enough -- cost me plenty of rocks, too.

I thumbed through the Bob Howard pile and pulled one out at random. There was his fine-lined, green-inked John Henry. Title of the yarn was "Almuric," extracted from some 1939 issues of Weird Tales and very neatly bound by a professional binder. Then something clicked in my noggin: that this smelled. I had it! "Two-Gun" Bob had cashed his chips on June 11th in 1936. So how the hell could he have autographed this deal? I did a good job of controlling my face as I tried to put it with the others. My brain chucked any ideas that the handwriting had sprung from the spirit world. The McGoy shouldn't have tried it. Hell, any starry-eyed punk would know the facts. It was a cinch the whole works was just like this one.

Just then Velvet Dress came sauntering into the room. She must have gotten lonely. She gave us a condescending appraisal, especially me. She said in a husky voice, "Come on, you freaks, and I'll buy a drink."

"We ain't thirsty," McGoy rasped. I was, and hungry too, but not for grub. "We're doin' business," he finished, a note of dismissal coloring his voice.

Velvet Dress turned archly and headed back toward the door. I watched her swing. It was neat. Where the hell was a jig band to go with it? Then she suddenly had a change of mind. She turned and crossed toward another door opposite -- evidently leading into a bath or another bedroom.

McGoy didn't seem to like this. He growled, "Where the hell you goin'?" The crags in his face jumped as though made of muscle.

"After some cigarettes, small fry," she said coolly.

"Here's some." He flung a pack at her. "And stay to hell away from that door."

But he was too late with the lip. She had the door wide open, ignoring the fags on the floor at her feet. It was another bedroom and I couldn't help seeing what was just across the sill. More stacks of magazines and a funny little table that looked like a bedside smoking stand only this particular article had a glass top and a light cord running from it to a plug-in in the wall. All this I took in at a quick glance as the tableau of McGoy and Velvet Dress held for a short breath. Whose, I'll never figure out.

He said, "Shut that door."

She appeared to ignore him but her blue eyes kindled a new kind of flame.

McGoy made a very fast shuffle toward the dame and swung a heavy mit at her, his pan clouding up with pounding blood. He looked brutal. He didn't get to slug her because just then I swung the barrel of my thirty-eight across his temple from behind and that ended that. He fell like a safe full of lead nickels.

She gazed approvingly at my handiwork, exhaling slowly. The late afternoon sun from the window touched her hair just right. Its coloring reminded me of a new automatic.

She said, "We better tie mutt-face up. He might be troublesome."

We did, with a gag and all the extras.

I said, "Now what'll we do with him?"

"Nothing now. Later we'll dump him in the Bay -- if you prefer."

I allowed it was a good idea.

She went on, looking down at him, "He was hard to take. Head too big for the peanut brain. The steady diet of his egotism and brigandry was wearing on me." She hesitated, then went on quietly with her eyes boring into mine, "I'm a great one for the natural and more simple things of life."

Me too, I thought.

I went on through the door she had opened and sized up the room. It was nice, like the others. Littered to the rafters, though. The only place stuff wasn't stacked was in the fireplace. That had been spared.

It was easy to figure how the glass-topped smoking stand with the light cord fit in. I marveled at the punk's guts. Several bottles of different colored inks and various sized pens were on a nearby shelf. Just then Velvet Dress put her hand gently but persuasively on my arm. She said, as she steered me toward a divan near the fireplace, "I'll buy that drink now. You earned it."

I figured I'd earned more than a drink, but hell, I'm no boor.

I said, "Sure, and maybe you'll tell dear old Boyle all about this little dodge."

She fixed me a rye-in-the-ditch and we lit cigarettes.

I liked being around this dame. She was all reet. We parked on the divan, her long leg touching mine, but in a polite way, of course. It had a personality; I could feel it. The cool way her voice husked into my ear was swell music suggestive of a Berigan trumpet.

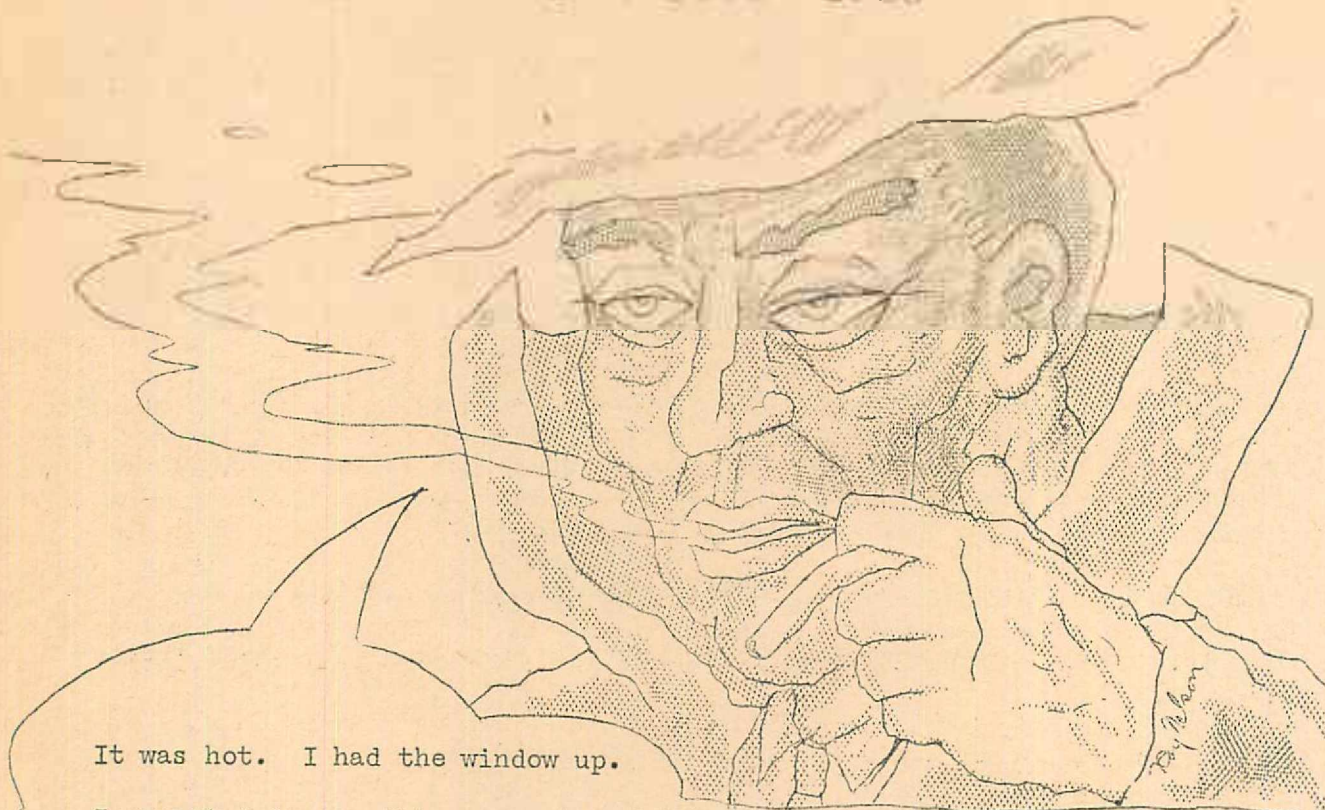
She said, "You can see the set-up. To start with he had about five or six original pieces he'd collected while in the heat of fanning, he told me. All he does now is cruise the old magazine stores, rip out the yarns he thinks he can peddle, hold them over that glass with the light underneath and trace the signature from the original under it. He's got all the pens and inks to match -- even though they don't have a faded look he gets by. It's a damn dirty stunt."

I didn't answer for a moment. Then I said, "Guess I'll burn the whole works." While I was building a nice little blaze in the fireplace I could hear McGoy's feeble thumping through the open door. The dame got up and closed it. With the arson act well under way I parked comfortably on the divan again. We didn't say much, just watched the flame lick away McGoy's artlessness.

Then somebody in the apartment across the court-shaft turned on the radio and a dixie combo started kicking out "Four Or Five Times". Velvet Dress laid her head on my shoulder where I could find her lips and her breath was warm and fragrant on my neck. I found them.

I was glad I'd come to Croyford on Wednesday instead of Saturday, four days ahead of schedule.

THE GIRL WITH THE MUDDY EYES



It was hot. I had the window up.

I wasn't doing anything except a little wondering. I was running through my mind whether a jessie named Velvet Dress had dumped Pat McGoy in the bay like we'd been talking about. I didn't think she had. Maybe I should have stuck around longer and helped her with the job. As it was I'd skipped right out and left her with him. Of course he was tied and gagged, but still, she could have had a change of heart. I got to thinking that if he were loose I'd probably have a little trouble with him eventually. That line of thinking bothered me. I changed it.

...What I didn't know then was that McGoy had a sister, name of Maria McGoy....

As I say, I changed my line of thinking. Velvet Dress: a sweet kid, if a little impetuous. I liked her from the first and played it accordingly. I let my thoughts whisk hither and thither; I smiled, wetted my lips. Velvet Dress...

Suddenly -- very suddenly, I became acutely aware of another wonder of Nature. A vagrant breath of air drifted through the open window. It was laden with the fragrance of orange blossoms and it kicked me squarely in the teeth.

My eyes cast about the twelve by fourteen room that is the Shamrock Agency, inventoried its streaked, damp walls. A lonely spider languished in a darkened corner. Then I pulled open a drawer in the desk, took out the company bottle and took a swallow. What trickled down my throat was room temperature. I spat it out, looked up at the ceiling. The spider sardonically thumbed its nose at me.

I got the hell out of there.

I walked the five blocks to the bus station, said to the gee in the ticket cage, "I want a round trip ticket to wherever the hell this'll take me." I laid out two bucks. He eyed them, consulted a poster. He said, "How about Mullin's Beach? One-ninety-six, plus tax." I laid out the extra for Uncle Sammy.

It was hot. The sky hung low like the inside of a skillet. I chewed a toothpick.

On the bus I got squeezed between a fat dame and a drunk. We rode away in heavy traffic, then finally got lined out down a straightaway centered between thousands of square acres of orange groves. Over the fat dame's bulwarks I could see a lot of shorts-garbed gals of around sixteen or seventeen picking up a tan. I reminded myself to come back in ten years when I'd cashed in my bonds and was driving that red Packard convertible and familiarize myself more thoroughly with the situation. Then I got stuck with the thought that in another ten years it would probably be a biological impossibility and decided to put all my bond accruals into real estate. I got tired of that line of thought too.

The fat dame stank of garlic and the drunk was fast asleep with his mouth open. When he breathed a bubble drew in and out of his mouth. In and out -- in and out -- never quite reaching the breaking point, never quite disappearing. It fascinated me. When I got off the bus at Mullin's Beach, I stuck the toothpick in the bubble, but it didn't wake him up.

Mullin's Beach is a one-shot town: one poolroom-saloon, one theater, one weekly paper, one grocery store, one drugstore, one dozen gas pumps. I found all this out while cruising the one-block business district. The one sun that shone was hotter than the one which shone where I'd come from. Funny what's in a name: Mullin's Beach is nowhere near the sea; the beautiful sea...

I stepped warmly into the darkened confines of the poolroom-saloon.

Two transient loiterers were haranguing the bartender, who looked something like Hitler only his nose was bent and one front tooth was broken halfway off.

I laid a buck down on the pine bar and said, "Double rye and a glass of water." The loiterers shut up and edged closer to me. I knew what they wanted. The Hitlerish bartender leered, raised one eyebrow, deftly inquiring if I wanted his two cronies in on it. I said pointedly, "Coincidentally, I'm not staying long." That subdued them.

What he poured from a greasy bottle was certainly not rye nor any approximate variation. I frowned at him and he tried to stare me down. I was getting sore.

He stuck the buck in his pants pocket and turned to his two chums, beginning the harangue at about where I'd come in. He had a strident voice. I hated his guts.

"So you're still stickin' with your story, huh?" He addressed the shorter, greasier of the two. That worthy blinked and nodded half-heartedly. He looked at his companion, a thin-faced guy, then at a spot on the bar. Thin Face looked at a spot on the farther wall. Hitler said belligerently:

"Whatta you say? You look smart. Anyhow, what difference does it make -- I'm right. Hell, everybody knows New Mexico's not part of the forty-eight states." He spat through the hole the broken tooth made, ran his tongue partly out, in a follow-up. It was a red, nasty looking thing. He leered at Thin Face.

Thin Face looked at me, took courage. He said, "I still think you're wrong. Anyhow, they taught me in school that it was one of the United States."

Hitler got a poisoned look on his face. "How the hell you figure? How come they call it New Mexico, then? How come they talk that Mexican lingo there, then? How come..." Then he remembered me. That fat guy shuffled his feet, shot me a pallid glance. Thin Face swallowed noisily. They needed a drink. But not on me.

Hitler tried to stare me down again. I let him. I was doing some thinking. I tasted a little of the water. It was flat, having absorbed some of the flavor of the room. I washed it down with the ersatz rye.

Finally Hitler said to me, "Well...you look smart to me; tell these punks New Mexico ain't part of the forty-eight states."

Then I got mad. Just for the books, I've been around. I've read a little, too. I've got a pretty fair smattering of how this country got started. I said in a classroom voice:

"Boys, it's like this: New Mexico is a southwestern state of the United States. The area is 121,666 square miles. The population 531,818. It's bounded by Colorado, Oklahoma, Texas and Old Mexico." I cleared my throat. "Now get this, boys," I said. "The Spaniards held the territory after it was conquered by Coronado in 1540. In 1821, it won independence from Spain and became a Mexican province. The United States acquired the territory in 1848 at the close of the Mexican War. And in 1853 it was enlarged by the Gadsden Purchase." I paused, before delivering the k.o. "And in 1912, it became one of the forty-eight states." I counted three round mouths.

Hitler recovered first. He sneered.

"A wise jay, huh?" he spat and shoved the tongue part way out at me. "I got five bucks which says you're a liar."

I don't like being called a liar, but I don't heat up fast. "Bet with these guys," I said.

"Whattsa matter, no guts? The way you got that spiel off like a young lawyer, you oughta be able to back it up," he screamed. He was almost frothing.

I balled my fist, counted four knuckles. Then I counted three and one half teeth still in his mouth. I said, "Prove New Mexico isn't one of the United States." I threw down five bucks. The two bums were spellbound.

The bartender got out a green book about four inches thick and thumbed through to the N's with a smirk. He turned it so I could read. What I read was about New Mexico but it didn't say a damn thing about it being one of the forty-eight states. Hitler shoved the five in his pants.

I got the hell out of there.

*** *** ***

I tried the drugstore. I ordered an ice-cream soda and thumbed through the magazines on the rack. It was hot and the .38 holster was getting damp and soaking up my shirt. A book on ju-jitsu held my attention; with a knowledge of that science I could throw the heater away. Then I picked up a science-fiction magazine and headed back to the booth where my soda was. I thumbed through the pages, just to see what the boys were doing with the stuff now. Years past, I'd read a lot of it. My collection -- a magnificent one -- was stored in a warehouse. It's quite a hobby. It'll make a fanatic out of you. I ought to know.

I kept one eye on the poolroom-saloon across the street.

A couple of kids came in, ordered cokes, shoved a nickel in the juke-box. Fatha' Hines' "Boogie Woogie on St. Louis Blues" came at us. The sallow looking pharmacist frowned. The kids cruised the magazine rack.

I kept an eye on the place across the street. The kids, clean looking lads of about seventeen, passed my booth evidently looking for some gals. Then they spotted the magazine in my hand.

The blond one with the downy upper lip said, "Gee, do you read that stuff?" I fumbled the mag, turned red. Then I saw the awe in his face.

They looked like good kids. I said, "Sure. Anyway, I used to all the time."



The one with curly dark hair said, "Gee, Harvey, I'll bet he's a fan."

Harvey took the cue. "Are you a fan, mister?"

I said I used to be. I said I was a little interested yet, occasionally. "I got a swell collection," I told them. "Even if a little dated." I named off a few choice items that came easily to mind.

"You got a few minutes, mister?" Harvey asked. I said I guessed so. I took a drink of the soda. The ice-cream was melting fast.

Harvey said, "I'm Harvey Brown and this is Marty MacMillan. Gee, you're the second fan we ever met." They sat down.

"Who was the first one?" I asked.

Harvey said, "Clinton Koegler. He lives here in Mullin's Beach." I'd heard the name a lot of years back.

I said I was Harry Boyle. Now Harry Boyle might not mean much to the layman, but these kids ate it up. Why? Harvey said, "Not the Harry Boyle who used to..." Marty looked ecstatic.

Just for the record, in my early days I used to knock out a sweet little column for that best of all fan magazines, that semi-fabulous amateur rag THE ASTROVOX. I appeared along with such giants as G. Summers Whitely, Scott Diego, Jaxon L. St. Ives-Bell and Deward Vayden. Guys that were and still are tonnotchers.

Harvey and Marty remembered my name but I doubted if they'd ever seen a copy of THE ASTROVOX, now a veddy, veddy rare item in any collector's book.

It was nice talking to these kids. They admired me.

"Mr. Boyle, would you autograph a copy of ASTROVOX Number One for us?" Marty asked eagerly.

My jaw dropped. Where would a kid like him get a copy of that number, the way the price tag hung on them? I swallowed, said, "Sure, sure."

I took a gander across the street at the poolroom-saloon. The two bums were walking out. I said, "Excuse me, boys; I'll be right back." They said they'd wait. The saloon clerk stared at me.

*** *** ***

Hitler was taking a drink, solo, when I walked in. I gave him a huge smile, flashed my eyes beguilingly. I used to be quite a Thespian. His leer in my direction exuded caution. I said, "Chum, I got a seee-well idea. Come here." I motioned him closer to me.

He held the drink a moment in his mouth, then swallowed noisily without making a face. He said, "Yeh?" His eyes got nasty at me. "What's in it for me?"

He was close to me, now, across the bar.

"This, chum." My four knuckles obliterated three and one-half front teeth. Then I leaped over the bar and got him with my heel. His nose moved the other way -- under duress. Then I walked over and snapped the latch on the door, got a couple of dirty towels and hung them over the window and the door pane, with some tacks I found scattered around. I poured myself a tumbler of Scotch from the bottle Hitler had had in his hand. It wasn't bad. I took what was left in the bottle and poured it over my knuckles, which had started to bleed. Then I lit a cigarette.

I found the thick, green covered book under a pile of deceased flies and old newspapers. What was left of the gold lettering said it was Pilson Hunnycutt's Alphabetical History of North America. I turned a page or two. I read where it was copyrighted in 1898. I spat out a shred of tobacco, stuck my jaw out. 1898, huh? I thought. I looked at Hitler, who hadn't moved. There was blood around.

The third or fourth page from the back of the book was naked except for a line of very small print. I walked over toward the windows, strained my eyes. I read where the book was printed on the press of one Clinton Koegler of Mullin's Beach.

Now I'll tell you about this Koegler. When I was a kid he was one of the more prominent fans. Probably six or seven years older than me. Then all of a sudden he ceased activity, but it got around that he had been whisked off to Blacklodge Mental Hospital. Prior to that, he'd been quite a brain. But you know how these brains are, sometimes.

Evidently he'd finally been cured and was running the weekly here in Mullin's Beach. Mullin's Beach, which in 1898 had been just another bush on the desert.

It didn't track. Then I stuck my nose between the pages as I rippled them with my thumb. They smelled -- medicinal.

I stuck the book under my coat. Then I threw a dirty wet towel over Hitler's face and beat it out the back door.

*** *** ***

Harvey and Marty were still in the booth. I said, "Just a second," and headed for a phone. I got the long distance operator and called Sam Bellman, a lab man over at the Trinity Chemical Company. Sam and I have done a lot of fishing together.

"Sam," I said, "can you tell within ten years how old a book is?"

He thought I was kidding. "Sure," he said. "And you can too. Just look at the copyright."

"No," I said. I got a book I'm sending over and I want you to tell me if it was recently printed or whether the copyright date is authentic. I got a funny thing here, Sam."

"Can do."

"Okay. I'll call you sometime between ten and midnight."

He said oke and hung up.

I said "Just a minute" to the kids again. I got some wrapping paper and wrapped the book up and headed for the Post Office. I sent the package special delivery.

When I got back, I spent fifteen cents for three cokes. Harvey and Marty seemed relieved when I got all settled in the booth and could talk. I asked, "Would you guys fix it so I could meet this Clinton Koegler? I used to read his stuff years ago and always wanted to meet him." I looked as ecstatic as I could.

The idea of bringing us two old-timers together thrilled them. "You bet," said Marty. "He lives only three blocks from here. We can walk over right now."

"Gee, Mister Boyle," Harvey said. "We wanted you to autograph that copy of THE ASTROVOX for us. We'll be taking up a lot of your time." He looked put out. I said not to worry about that.

"How about me running home real fast and getting it and bringing it here? That won't take long." I said that would be swell.

When he got back with the magazine, I wrote my name boldly where he wanted it. The magazine looked pretty timeworn. It was nice to see a copy of it once more. Brought back old memories. Then I rippled the pages close to my nose, inhaling. Just as I thought. I said:

"Where'd you get this?"

Harvey said, "Me and Marty got a whole file -- seventeen issues -- off of Clinton Koegler for five bucks. Swell, eh?"

I said "Yeh" deep in my chest. I was thinking that most collectors had to pay from fifty to seventy-five bucks ordinarily if and when dealers could and would supply them.

Marty grinned. He said freely, "We got a bargain. Mister Koegler says he's going to sell 'em to all the fans. Only five bucks." He looked at Harvey. "That's sure a deal," he said.

Harvey said, "Boy, he's sure going to make some dough. I'll bet he's got a thousand copies stored in his basement."

I said, "Let's go meet this Koegler."

I multiplied seventeen by seventy-five and got twelve hundred and seventy-five. Seventeen being the number of issues and seventy-five being the number of copies (or

nearly so) of each issue. I knew damn well that there weren't that many copies floating freely around. I knew that one guy wouldn't have them all if there were. I knew that nearly all the copies had been pretty well assimilated by collectors during the past decade.

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We walked rapidly toward Koegler's house. It was a big three-story frame house with a lot of paint gone, a lot of loose shingles, and it reminded me of a fat dame in too tight a dress as it tried to conceal itself on a piece of ground which was covered with a dried-up lawn and a few scrubby locust trees. Its green blinds were partly drawn and the windows needed washing. A piece of cracked and patched rubber hose lay dead across a gravel walk.

We each took a turn at knocking. Nobody answered. We waited a minute, then tried it again. Nobody answered again, either. The kids looked at me. I could tell they wanted to go. I said, "I'll just stick around here on the porch till someone comes home. Hell," I emphasized, "I can introduce myself...he's doubtless heard of Harry Boyle."

Harvey said, "'Sfunny no one's here. His wife usually is."

Marty sniggered when Harvey said "wife". They leered at me. I caught on.

I said I'd wait till either Mrs. Koegler or Clinton himself showed up. We shook hands all around and Harvey and Marty started back toward town.

I tried the front door again, then went around the house and tried the other two doors. Nobody answered. Then I parked myself on the big front porch and lit a cigarette. I wondered if I'd ever see Harvey Brown and Marty MacMillan again. So far, I never have.

I stared at the gravel walk. The patched hose still lay dead across it.

Then I got up, made a tour again. Luckily the house stood by itself and nobody saw me. The windows were all locked. Then I found a loose brick in an old shed and broke out the glass in one of the basement windows. The cracking glass was deafening. I stared guiltily around. Evidently, I was the only guy in that part of Mullin's Beach. I got on my belly and lowered myself into the dark maw I'd created. Then I lit my lighter and found a wall switch over near a door. I tried the door and it was locked. I glanced around. The basement walls were lined with stacks and stacks of THE ASTROVOX. Enough copies to paper the walls of the Senate Chamber. I nosed around. All the mags looked pretty old. They all had that medicinal whang. I tried the door again. It was still locked.

I took out my pocket knife and attacked the screws holding the hinges with the screwdriver blade. The door came off and I creaked upstairs into a large kitchen. It was the usual kitchen of an old house. The woodwork was a dirty gray and profusely fly-specked. The linoleum was faded and worn around the stove, the sink and refrigerator. Another worn spot headed toward a dismal walnut-finished door. I followed it.

Through a dining room I passed into a gloomy, furniture-strawed space that I knew must be the living room. A small balcony protruded over one corner of it. I spotted a wide and carpet-covered stairway leading upward.

I climbed, reached the balcony, at the same time clumsily hooking my toe in a torn place in the carpet. Some three or four shiny tacks were ripped loose. I let them lie. Left of a large, heavily built and entirely out-of-place wood cabinet and not far from a small table on which reposed a phone, I spotted a door. Then I

stopped, listened. The house was very still. A peculiar and by now familiar medicinal odor was beginning to brush my nostrils. I opened the door and entered a room. It was the most habitable I'd seen, although messy. The blinds were half drawn and the room was bathed in shadow. I could make out shelves and shelves of books. A couple of comfortable chairs beckoned.

But I decided to look around. I drew the blinds, turned on a couple of floor lamps. Then I spotted another door partway open. I stepped in and saw what was intended for a lab of sorts. It was from here that the smell came. I went in, made a tour through a maze of various sized open-topped vats; some racks on which sheets of paper hung limply as if in the process of drying or curing; several lamps which reminded me of those ultraviolet ray jobs some people buy. Shelves were laden with all sorts of bottles. None were labeled Scotch. I stepped back into the other room.

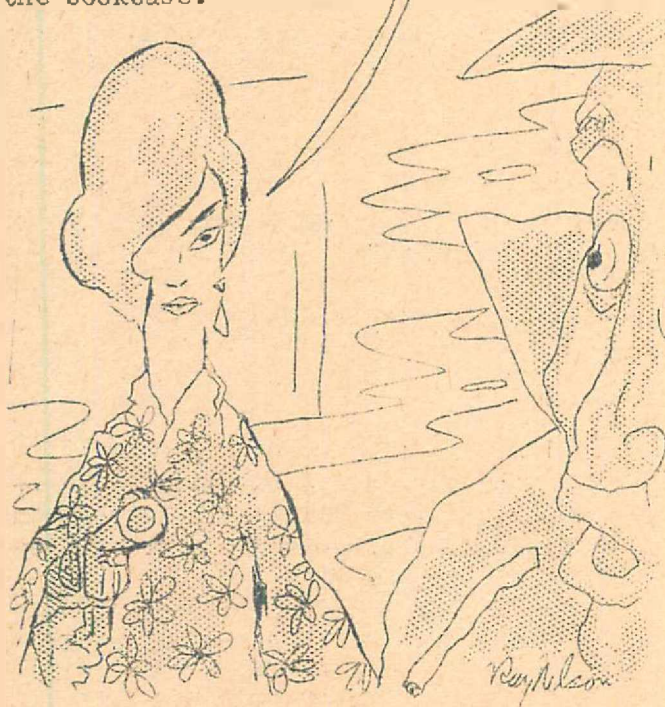
I scanned a flock of books reposing in a case along one wall. There were books on making ink; the manufacture of paper; treatment of fabrics. There were one or two good novels.

It was still hot. I ran my hand across my face. It made a rasping sound.

I found the bathroom, looked in the little cabinet above the washbowl, found a safety razor and some blades. I put in a new one and lathered up. I wanted to take a bath but decided against it. When I returned to the library, I felt swell. I unbuttoned my coat, walked over toward the bookcase.

Behind me a voice said, "Raise 'em." I did.

The voice said, "Turn around, but slowly." I did. It was a lean voice. A gun, a .22 target pistol, was clasped firmly in a lean hand. I leaned back against the bookcase.



"Sparse" is a good word. It describes a lot of things. The girl behind the gun was sparse. The loosely made housecoat didn't leave much to the imagination. Her legs were fatless, but they were definitely not emaciated. She had a flat stomach, narrow hips and wide shoulders. She was about my height, five-seven.

Her face was unique. Not a pretty face, yet an interesting one. Her hair, blonde with a pronounced brown accent, was brushed down a la Veronica. Her brow was rather low and wide. The face as a whole was not too unattractive. I figured this was mostly due to the crag-gily accented bone structure of it. I'd seen a face similar to this one recently. There was a marked resemblance. It even dittoed in the voice.

The gun was still leveled my way. She looked determined and not lacking in capability.

I looked boldly into her eyes. They were large and light brown. The brown looked like it was on the point of melting into the whites. I stared, thinking I'd see it happen.

"Lady," I said, "you're either high, need a drink, or just woke up."

She didn't think that was very funny. The muddy eyes slid from my face to my left armpit. She said, "Now very carefully, very carefully, draw out that rod and lay it on the floor and kick it over here." I drew out the gun very carefully. "That's right -- very good." I kicked it. She slowly bent and picked it up, never taking those mud spots off of me.

Her own gun, the .22, she carelessly threw in a chair. Mine, the .38, she held on me.

I was beginning to be very amused.

This was indeed a hot place. Hotter than where I'd come from. I'd crossed the trail of an old-time fan who was evidently trying to make himself a little change. I'd met a couple of nice kids; been irritated by a bartender who seemed to all appearances to know Clinton Koegler, the aforementioned fan. (At least he'd once owned a book that had been in the Koegler home.)

...I'd often wondered why it was Koegler had been taken to Blacklodge Hospital in his early twenties. I, personally, didn't think he was nuts. Just a little enthusiastic about his own quaint version of Nietzscheism, which he'd spread in various fan publications as well as his own. He was wont to intimate that he, as well as other fans and believers in such rot as "cosmic endeavors" and "cosmic truths," might well be, at some future time, rulers of the Earth -- even the Universe. At least, he promised, their progeny might. He wrote well, wrote convincingly. Some rather forceless souls, I'd heard, accepted his craperoo....

The way things stood, I was guilty of assault, breaking and entering, and perhaps even of contributing to the delinquency of a couple of minors. No one I'd met so far was half as guilty of any crime as I was at the moment. I had to laugh when I thought of what actually had brought me to Mullin's Beach. I looked straight into the barrel of my own .38 and laughed.

The girl ignored it.

"I been watching you -- you and them snoopy kids. Okay, make your spiel." She jerked the gun -- my good old .38. "Why did you come here?"

I was still laughing. "Because a spider very naughtily thumbed its nose at me."

"Cut the guff."

I said, "Believe me, lady, that's so. But I'm glad I've come." I made it sound sincere; straight from the heart. "I've met a couple of swell kids -- fans, like Clinton Koegler used to be. I've always wanted to meet Clint. Those boys told me he was here. He's heard of me -- I'm Harry Boyle. At present I'm a private eye, but I used to be a fan."

"You think Clint'll be glad to see you? I doubt it. He's pretty busy. He don't like cops -- and neither do I."

"But he might like to see me as a fan, not as a cop. If you'll look through those copies of THE ASTROVOX in the basement, you'll see how I used to rate," I said.

She didn't bother to ask how it came that I'd been in the basement.

"I've never read them, but someday, when I got nothing else to do, I'll take a look. Clint and those kids that brought you here talk enough about fans and such to

suit me." She still held the gun on me. I began to laugh again.

I said, "Why did you throw your gun away and take mine? Simple: because yours was empty."

Her muddy eyes took on a sort of movement resembling under-poached eggs. I said, "Mine's empty, too. I've always been scared of a loaded gun."

She squeezed the trigger. The hammer snapped emptily. "See?" I said.

She drew a deep breath, let it out slowly. "Okay," she said, handed me back the gun, and sank into a chair. The housecoat dropped open. I sat down, lit a smoke. She kept her eyes on me. The bone structure of her face interested me.

"You got a brother by the name of Pat McGoy?" I asked.

She studied me a moment. "Yeh," she said. "I'm his sister, Maria. How'd you know?"

"You look a lot alike," I said.

"We should. I'm his twin."

"He used to be a fan, too," I said.

"Yeh, he was one of them." She got a little interested. "Come to think of it, I've heard him mention you."

We were getting noplacé. I wanted to ask her a lot of things but I didn't think I'd get any right answers. I looked at my watch. It was getting late. I said, "Wonder what's keeping Clint? Working late?"

"Maybe."

"I'll wait."

"Well, I might as well get us a drink," she said finally. I decided she wasn't so bad after all.

While she was gone I heard her make a phone call from the hallway. Then she came back with some glasses, a bottle and a pitcher of ice water. She did the pouring.

I said, "Who'd you call?"

"Clint -- at the paper office. Just wondered when he'd be along." She gave me a funny appraising glance. "I didn't mention you, though."

"He'll come alone?"

"Maybe. What do you care? You're only a fan -- an old buddy -- an old pen-pal."

I could see she was thinking me over a lot -- perhaps trying to make me say something that would prove my visit was something over and above just a dropping-in for old time's sake.

We sipped our drinks slowly, not talking. Then I brought up the subject of how Brother Pat was doing. She said he was doing okay. I asked, "With Marara-Cillio?"

She said yeh. I asked her if Brother Pat had any idea that Clinton Koegler was placing in circulation a reproduction of a very old and very high-class fan magazine at a very cheap rate.

"He might," she said, "but I don't think he gives a damn. As you said, he's tied up with Marara-Cillio. No time for this other stuff."

I figured she was covering up, not really wanting to lie. I let it drop. I knew about Pat.

I looked at my watch. I wanted to call Sam Bellman about that book. If the book was a forgery, it wouldn't mean too much. Yet, if not, I'd feel pretty well let down. Those copies of THE ASTROVOX were forged sure enough. Law of averages proved that. I figured this woman, Maria McGoy, wasn't interested in the fan-world. I wondered where she slid into this. I figured if I knew more about Koegler's recent activities since his release, I'd have the answer to Maria. Evidently she wasn't his wife; she wore no ring.

I studied her in the glow of the two lamps. Her face was oddly shadowed and I thought I caught a lonely, fearful expression about her. The craggy lines of her face, which had held a certain hardness, had softened. I sensed that her lean, terse way was only used to cover up something that lay dormant and that needed awakening. I surveyed her figure under the housecoat. I liked it.

I drained my drink, got up. "Think I'll make a phone call," I said. "Fix us another drink, eh?" I walked out. She didn't say anything; just eyed me speculatively.

I got the long-distance operator and I could hear her buzzing Bellman's number. She kept buzzing. Finally she said, "Your party doesn't answer." I told her to let it go. I was a little early for that call anyway, I figured.

I struck a pose against the table which supported the phone. I was trying to do a little lightning calculating. My eyes followed the ways and mottled and stained and torn byways of the wallpaper design. Then I saw the neat little pencil marks bracketed under a couple of roses mounted at each corner of a very artistically designed three-stringed harp. It was that kind of wallpaper. I made out the pencil marks: "Dave Leebe -- pvt line -- Op 16 -- 700."

Dave Leebe, huh? Dave Leebe, Governor. A big man running a big state. Now everybody knows, or thinks he knows, that it's Leon Marara-Cillio's money that's been backing Leebe for years. The two go together. It's pretty common knowledge who's going to win the Party's approval at the next convention. He can't miss, with Marara-Cillio giving the pushes.

I frowned. Quite a potpourri: me, the McGoy twins, Koegler, some fan magazines, an old book and -- Dave Leebe and a syndicate like the Marara-Cillio bunch.

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Maria hadn't moved when I came back from phoning. She still had the same expression about her. I could see she was thinking. I gave a couple of highly accented sniffs, exhaling pointedly. She rolled her eyes over to me. I said, "What's the small, some new brand of soap?"

She sighed, nodding her head toward the open door into the lab. "Hardly. That's some of Clint's work."

So she would talk. I'd detected a new note in her voice. A relaxing. The brownness of her eyes didn't look quite so muddy, but more like the drying moss of autumn.

I tried a shot. I pulled a chair around close to hers, sat down and peered tenderly into her eyes. I said, "Look, Maria, this is straight from the shoulder. How would you like to get the hell out of here and forget all this? Hell, woman, I can see easy enough that it isn't paying off. Not for you."

She gave me a look. I could see she was thinking it over. I could see I'd given her a bump. Finally she said, "You think not, eh? So you know about this."

I didn't know about this, but I expected to.

She went on, "What kind of an offer you got that's better than this?"

I thought quickly.

"Why," I improvised, "I can give you peace and quiet and the security of utter domesticity."

She leaned forward, her eyes almost staining mine, the light making oddly shaped shadows out of the craggy outline of her face.

"Yeah?" she said, low-voiced. Then she kissed me. I've been kissed before, but this was different. She didn't eat me, nor did she blister me; she didn't push my teeth back. But I knew I'd been kissed. Minutes afterward I could still feel her lips. It was that kind of kiss.

"No sooner said than done," I said thick-voiced, quoting a sentence from some old fairy tale.

"Get me out of here," she said, then she kissed me again.

"Isn't Clint due here pretty soon?" I asked.

"As a rule he doesn't show up for an hour or so after I call him. He's busy, you know." She said the last with an edgy inflection.

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I lay quietly, hearing Maria pattering around in the bathroom. Then I got up, took a few barefooted steps, pulled out the watch in my pants pocket. It was eleven-ten. I figured I ought to give Sam Bellman another try. Instead, I flopped down on Maria's bed again. In a few minutes she came back where I was. She had on a dandy looking tan gabardine suit, gloves to match. She carried a large handbag which also matched. She sat on the edge of the bed and kissed me. I felt swell. I could tell by the look she gave me she liked me a lot. I said, "See what I mean?" She nodded.

She strolled over and stood in the doorway, watching me. As I got into my clothes I talked. "It's like a wheel, isn't it?" I said. "Leebe, Marara-Cillio, your brother -- all hooked together. Now I see Leebe's private number tabbed on your wallpaper by the phone. That makes Clint in it someplace. That puts Clint in the bigtime. Now where the hell do some reissued numbers of a fine but little-known fan magazine like THE ASTROVOX come in?" I looked up from tying my shoe. "For that matter, where do you come in? It's a gut you don't like Koegler much. Not too much, anyhow."

I got up, shrugged into my shirt. It was still a little wet from sweat and my shoulder holster felt clammy when I put it on. Maria just stood in the doorway. When I was beside her she said, "Harry, I'm going to tell you the works. When I tell it, I'm asking for trouble. Plenty. But it's the best way. I'm going all the way with you on this and I'll expect you to go all the way with me. And when it's all over I'm going away and start living again. That is, if I'm alive. You see, I've been playing with some tough boys. And for keeps. And I'm going all out on this with you -- and for keeps."

I nodded and we walked into the hallway, stopping by the phone. What could I say?

I lit a cigarette, handed it to her. "Leon Marara-Cillio took me and Pat off the streets when we were kids," she said, exhaling around her words. "Some of that schooling was in his school -- a rough school. He made a punk out of Pat; not much better out of me. The last few years I've been looking for a chance to break away -- and take Pat. Looks like this is it."

I put a comforting hand on her shoulder. "Listen, baby, any play you make I'll back to the limit. I mean it, honey. Go on."

She did. "Governor Leebe got Clint out of Blacklodge to do some speech-writing for him. I don't know how he really first heard about him. Then, when this deal came up, Leon Marara-Cillio sent me over here to live with and love Clint and mainly keep an eye on him. Leebe and Marara-Cillio think Clint's wonderful on what he's doing, but they like to have a check on him. That's me." She paused, took a breath. I said nothing. But I put my hand on the phone. I felt something coming.

"Here's where the fan angle comes in," she went on. "You see, Clint isn't too nuts, but he's a fanatic on one thing: human mutation which creates a master race."

I remembered easily now. The stuff Clint used to write for the fan magazines years ago heavily pushed his idea. He was sincere in his beliefs then; a convincing writer. Then Blacklodge had claimed him.

"For the love of God, honey," I said, "where does reprinting all these copies of THE ASTROVOX come in?"

She gave me a tired smile. "It's easy, once you look at it -- smart, too. Leebe and Marara-Cillio figure figure he had quite a following in the fan world and they figured that if he passed out copies of THE ASTROVOX at a cheap rate to all the fans he'd be really set up in good graces with them again -- sort of excusing his hitch in Blacklodge. And here's the payoff: Leebe believes that master race jive, too. He's headed for the White House, believe it or not. The plan he and Marara-Cillio have doped out is a lulu. They're going into every group such as fandom with their stuff. They figure on getting the leaders in each field to pass on this bilge through cleverly and slyly written articles, verse, and fiction wherever possible. Hell, man, fans aren't the only ones on his list. He's getting all lined up to feed religious, fraternal organizations sugar-coated versions of his line. Quite a thing, eh? Anyhow, he sprang Koegler to work on you fans and help with any other thing that might come up."

I stuck a cigarette in my mouth musingly. "I don't think real fans would go for a chunk like that. Of course, there might be a few." Then I added, "Would you testify in court about this?"

She nodded.

I said, "Okay." Then I got busy on the phone. I called Ab Cohn, the young and ambitious assistant D.A. I said, "Ab, I've just stumbled into the damndest thing. Seems John Roy Carlson missed some boys when he was hanging it on Coughlin, Smith, and 'Handsome' McWilliams and boys like that. I've got a big duck and a witness with plenty of guts who'll testify till she's black in the face."

I gave him an outline of the whole thing, one eye on Maria, who still stood watching me. She looked relieved. I finished my conversation with Ab Cohn by saying, "Better get one of the Federal boys -- Ed Connors, if you can -- and have him come to your office. I'm bringing this witness right in and I want her to have plenty of protection." He said he would. "Better yet," I said, "maybe you better send a car over after us." I told him where we were. I hung up.

A warm sticky rain had started to fall. I didn't hear a thing but the rain. I sized Maria up. I said, "Maybe you made a mistake getting all fixed to go someplace. Maybe you should have just stayed in the housecoat. We're going to have to stick around now and talk to friend Koegler till the boys show up. We'll have to string him along, too, so he won't get wise."

A voice behind me said, "I'm wise already." I wheeled and saw two figures standing at the head of the stairway. One, a blond man with a fat face and thick glasses, I recognized as a grown-up Clinton Koegler. I'd seen his pic once when he was a youth, heading an article titled We Cosmic Men. He hadn't changed much, only put on more weight. The man standing behind him with the automatic leveled at Maria and me alternately, I couldn't recognize at all. Apparently he'd been in some sort of accident. His face was swollen and mangled. It looked like lacerated hog's liver.

Koegler said again, "I'm wise." Then he looked at me. He didn't recognize me. "You shouldn't have made that call. That makes it tough on you." Then he turned to Maria. "Leon will fix you, honey." The way he said his lines sounded like a judge pronouncing sentence.

Then the guy with the gun said, "Don't waste time with that rat. Let me fix him. Let me fix 'em both. Don't waste time."

That voice I'd heard before. The guy was Hitler.

Koegler said, "Shut up. I'll handle this."

But Hitler was trigger-happy. The automatic blasted. He shot low, toward Maria's legs.

He shot Maria in those lovely, lovely legs.

Maria was tough -- she sank slowly to the floor without opening her lips.

There was blood...those lovely, lovely legs...

Koegler shouted, "You fool, you goddam fool!" and jumped at Hitler's gun. I went nuts. A slug found its white-hot way into my shoulder muscle as I moved. With my good arm I jerked the worn rug loose from the two or three shiny tacks holding it and heaved. Koegler and his beat-up stooge were uprooted and thrown against the guardrail just at the top of the stairway. With a dry splintering sound it gave way and they toppled over the edge down into the room below. I heard a table or some other piece of furniture crackle as they landed. But even as they were falling I put my good shoulder against the heavy, dusty cabinet flanking the wall at the stair-head and heaved. It was built for permanence, because it took all my mad strength

to budge it across the little hallway and send it plummeting down where I figured Hitler and his Cosmic Man friend must be sprawling.

I heard it light with a squashy and padded sound which mingled well with the groaning.

Then I felt suddenly numb and tired. I decided I'd just sit a bit on the little table where the phone still reposed. I kept my eyes off Maria, fastened them on the wallpaper. The wallpaper of the three-stringed harp. Funny, a harp...

I don't remember sitting on the little table at all....

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Later, I opened one eye. All I could see was a nose. A great, heavy, tannish nose. I closed the eye. I lived, all right, no doubt about that. A pain in my shoulder attested that fact. I opened the same eye again, and still saw the nose, still an extremely liberal portion of cartilage and skin, rested benignly between two very sharp brown eyes. The eyes peered into mine; at the same time I could feel a hard object being gently forced between my teeth. I swallowed, having recognized the hard object. I swallowed a mouthful of very mellow Scotch. The eyes, the nose, resolved into a face. It was Ab Cohn.

I said, "I love you, I love you; oh, Ab, I love you."

Then a voice behind me said, "And me too?" I turned in the chair. Maria was parked on a settee. One of her legs was crudely bandaged. Only one. She got up, limped toward me.

I said, "Maria, I live you, I love you. ...Is Connors here too?"

"He's cruising this joint, here. Quite a dump, eh, kid?" I said it was. My eyes were still on Maria as she hobbled toward me. She read the question in my gaze.

"Just nicked. Guess I fainted."

Then Ed Connors came in from Koegler's workshop-laboratory. He said it was quite a dump, too. He stared speculatively toward the stairway a moment. "You're just plain tough. It must listen good."

I said, "Later, pal." Then Maria came close and gave me one.

*** *** ***

It was Maria McGoy's testimony that cracked little Leon Marara-Cillio at the Grand Jury hearing. And when little Leon began chattering, Governor Dave Leebe was finished. No, he was considerate enough to save the tax-burdened citizens the expense of a trial -- he took the easy way; as befits a man of his caliber.

Of course I got hold of Sam Bellman over at The Trinity Chemical Company as soon as I could about that book I'd sent him for analysis. The book didn't mean a dime. Veddy, veddy authentic. That page with the blurb about Koegler's press, etc., was just stuck in the back. It's a wonder I hadn't shaken it loose in handling or noticed its being separate from the rest of the pages, for that matter. Too much hurry, hurry, I guess. However, Sam said it had been treated and made to appear as old as the book in which it had been stuck. Having been on Koegler's book shelves, and close to his home laboratory, had given it that smell I'd noticed -- that, along with the loose sheet stuck in the back.

After the works were over, Maria stuck around my apartment for several weeks, doing a little cooking, a little sewing. But I could tell she was restless; she wouldn't let me help too much getting whatever was on her mind off. One day she didn't come home and I found her note stuck in the coffee jar. "I've got to find Brother Pat. When I do, I think we'll go away. Thanks for loving me."

I've never seen her since; and as I said before, I've never seen Pat either.

Through a little expert finagling, Ab Cohn made me sole owner and custodian of all those copies of the legendary ASTROVOX. They're in storage at...



FROM THE REVIEWS

"The Girl with the Muddy Eyes is the best piece of fan fiction that ever smashed me in the teeth like a breath of air laden with the fragrance of orange blossoms."

-- Milton A. Rothman,
in SHANGRI-L'AFFAIRES #35

