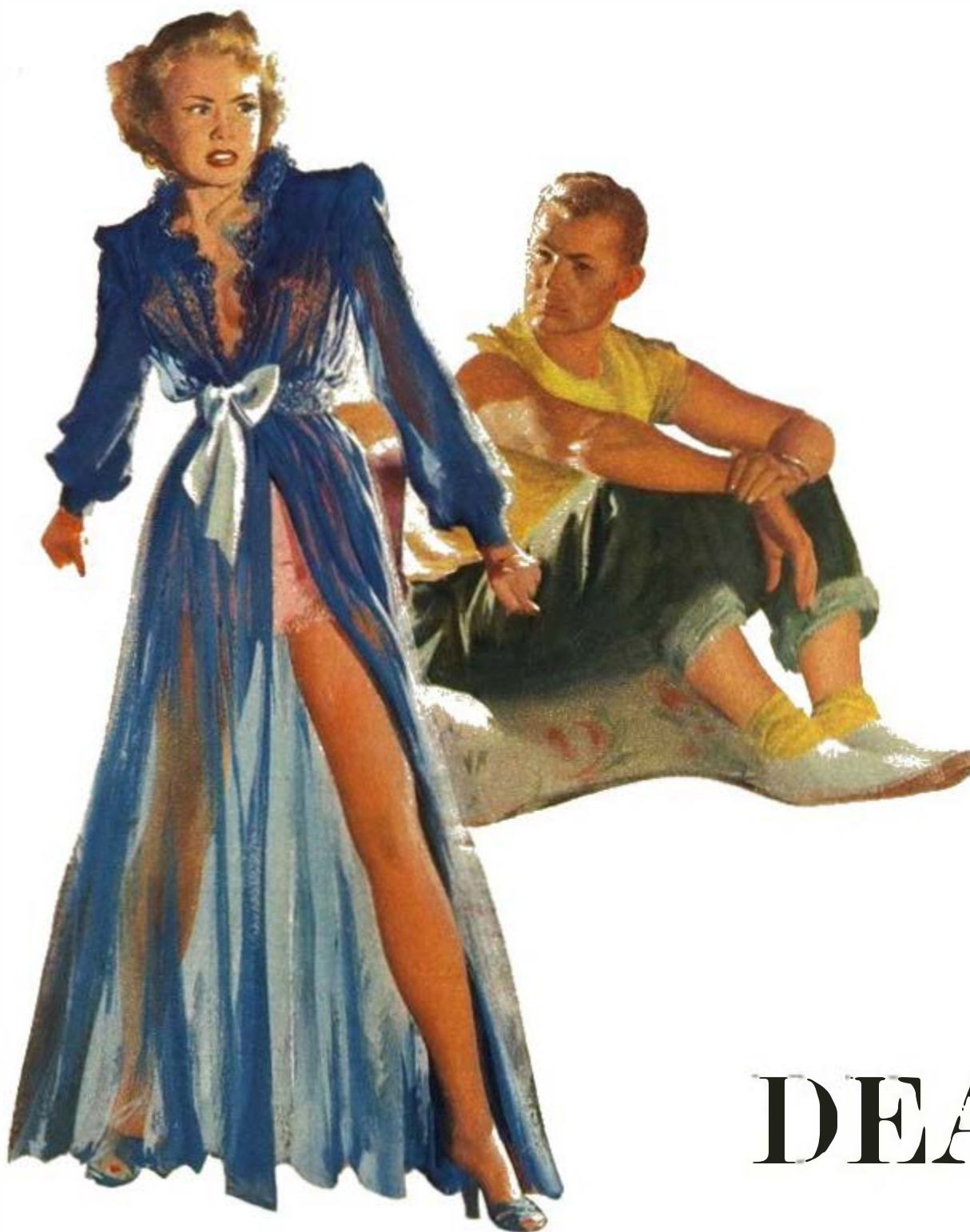




**Stuart Bailey, Private Eye**  
by  
**Roy Huggins**

**Death and the Skylark**  
**Now You See It**  
**Appointment with Fear**





# DEATH and the SKYLARK

*An ocean-going schooner carried a cargo of suspicion and fear* by Roy Huggins

**I**f it hadn't been for the yachts tied up at its long row of slips, the Los Angeles Yacht Anchorage would have looked like an abandoned fish hatchery. But the yachts were there, and as I went on down the floating boardwalk looking for the *Skylark* I began to wonder if it wasn't about time for me to raise my rates.

"The *Skylark*'s a fore-and-aft schooner," the man at the lunchroom had told me. Which didn't really help me very much. I wouldn't have recognized a fore-and-aft schooner if one had sailed right through my living room.

But about halfway down the walk I slowed to look at a boat that seemed somehow different from the rest, set low and long in the water, with slender lines and two high masts, and woodwork that appeared to have taken the polish of loving hands for a century or so. I looked for a nameplate and couldn't find one, but there seemed to be someone aboard, back at the stern.

I stepped down onto the narrower walk that ran alongside the ship and went on to the boarding ladder. Someone was there all right—a paunchy man in faded denim and a cork hat.

He was sitting in a deep-sea fishing boat attached to the deck and reading a paper that looked suspiciously like the *Wall Street Journal*.

I waited to see if he'd look up, and when he didn't I called out. "Could you tell me where I'll find the *Skylark*?"

"This is it," he said, peering down at me over his shoulder. He had the uneven, rumbling voice of a man who has grown fat in his fifties.

"I'm looking for Glen Callister," I said.

"I'm Callister."

"I'm Bailey. Thought you'd be expecting me."



"Oh." He stood up quickly and came over to the rail. "I was expecting a man more my own age. Don't know why exactly. Come on aboard."

I came aboard.

Glen Callister turned out to be a smaller man than he looked from the walk, only five feet six or less, with a barrel chest and legs that wanted to bow just a little. He shook my hand, gave me a pleasant smile that said he'd forgive me for being the wrong age, and suggested we talk down in the "main salon."

The open companionway was about at the center of the ship, the cockpit just a few feet back of it. I went down the steps first and Callister gestured toward a door at the end of the passage. He squeezed past me at the door and opened it, and I followed him into a room that was as unexpected as *crêpes Suzettes* at a picnic.

It was a large room filled with sun from a center skylight and the odor of fine scotch from a built-in bar. There were couches in soft beige on two sides of the room, a built-in refrigerator paneled in Philippine mahogany, a fireplace with a polished copper chimney, and a square grand piano attached firmly to one of the bulkheads.

Callister indicated one of the couches and carefully closed the door. He crossed the room and closed another door to what appeared to be the galley, came back to the center of the room, and glanced anxiously up at the half-open skylight. He took off the cork hat and sat down, running a hand through his silver-white hair.

He coughed shortly and said, "Well, what's the good word? Making the trip with us?"

"I'd like to, yes," I said, making it sound more like, "Maybe."

"What does that mean?"

"I've got a few questions to ask."

"Shoot. No, wait." Once again he peered up at the skylight, stood up and walked out of the room. While I waited, I took his letter out of my pocket and re-read it for the fifth time.

The letter had dropped through my office mail slot the afternoon before. It said simply and dispassionately that he was making a trip to Honolulu on his schooner, the *Skylark*, with himself as captain, and that he expected to be killed on the voyage. The murder would be attempted either by his wife or his first mate, he wasn't sure which. He had recently discovered that they were "carrying on illicitly behind my back." He wanted to know if I would come along and keep an eye on Madden—that was the first mate. If so, I was to come down and see him the next day. That was all.

It had taken the rest of the day for me to consider the letter seriously. By the time I got to bed I was beginning to think it could just be, and the next morning the notice for the office rent arrived. I decided it couldn't do any harm to go down to the harbor and see what it was all about.

I was putting the letter away when Callister came back. He had closed the skylight. He shut the door carefully again and said, still standing, "All right, you had some questions."

"The first one's pretty obvious. If you know one of them's going to try to kill you on this trip, why make it?"

"I never ran away from a fight in my life," he said matter-of-factly.

"You say one of them intends to kill you. Don't you know which it is?"

He sat down. "I don't think I'll answer that one yet."

I let that pass. "If Madden intends to kill

you, do you think having me aboard will stop him?"

"Do you?"

"No."

"Do you want the job?"

"I'm not sure I made myself clear."

"You made yourself clear in exactly the way I hoped you would. No one could guarantee anything on a job like this. Do you want it? You'll be passed off as a business associate. We don't talk business on the *Skylark*, so you won't have to worry about that."

"Sure," I said. "I'd love to make the trip. Will your first mate be able to sail the boat after he rubs you out?"

Callister just looked at me blankly for about ten seconds. Then he suddenly exploded in a laugh that came from the belt up. He laughed painfully for a full two minutes.

He stood up, and, still fighting a little for breath, pulled a folded check from his pocket and handed it to me. It was a cashier's check for five hundred dollars, made out to cash—a very handsome and discreet retainer.

He was getting ready to laugh again. "Be here Tuesday morning at nine," he managed, slapping me on the shoulder. "We're going to have a fine trip."

I could still hear him laughing when I stepped down onto the boardwalk to go back to my car.

Tuesday seemed a long time coming around, but it did, and at nine sharp I climbed onto the deck of the *Skylark* with my suitcase and shave kit. A man's head poked up from the companionway and a pair of moody eyes gave me a quick sizing up.

"Mr. Bailey?" he asked, politely enough, and I was grateful to him for asking it—for all I knew Callister had supplied me with a new name to go with my status as a business associate.

I told him I was Stuart Bailey and he said he was Owen Madden and came on up to shake my hand. He was wearing jeans and a T-shirt and no hat. The wind had been doing just the right thing with his dark, curly hair, giving it that

careless, ungroomed look that is a sheer deadfall for a certain kind of woman. He was an inch taller than I, as lean as an antelope, and wearing a tan that you can get only by mixing plenty of salt and wind with your ultraviolet. He looked about twenty-eight.

He took me below and opened a door at the right of the steps, showing me a room with two bunks, a wide chest of drawers, and not much else. "We bunk in here. The head's just across the passage. Shower, too."

I put my stuff on the floor and he offered to show me the rest of the boat.

The master's cabin was at the stern, a larger room with its own shower. The Callisters had already moved in—there were some shirts and denims on top of a cabinet, not yet put away; beside them several pipes, a ball of white string, and a book on fishing.

Next we went to the lounge, which Madden called the "gingerbread hatch," and then to the galley, which had a big old-fashioned wood stove in it, a large refrigerator, and space for one person—if he didn't breathe deeply.

I looked skeptically at the stove and asked, "Who chops the wood for it? And where?"

He grinned pleasantly and said, "Burns Diesel oil," and opened one of the doors off the galley to a small room with a bed covered by a lacy spread.

"This is where I usually hang my sack," he said, "but I guess Callister thought I'd better bunk with you instead of with his daughter."

"The tyrant," I said. "I didn't know she was coming this trip."

"She always comes," he said noncommittally, and opened another door in the galley bulkhead to show me a gloomy, disordered space filled with canned goods. "Crew's quarters," he said. "When we carry a crew, that is. There's another hatch up there in case of emergencies."

We walked back through the lounge and up the companionway.

"Are we carrying a crew this trip?" I asked.

"Nope. We seldom do. She's a sweet boat, the *Skylark*. Bold and (Continued overleaf)

ILLUSTRATED BY WENDELL KLING





sea-kindly. Built fifty years ago, when they really built 'em."

On deck, he stepped into the cockpit and, without wasting words, got down to the business of explaining what would be expected of me. He showed me how to operate what he called the "Iron Mike," an electric pilot that did the actual work for the man on watch, and explained that each of us would do a trick at the wheel four hours, then be off for twelve or sixteen, depending on how it worked out. Callister, he said, insisted on having the 4 a.m. to 8 a.m. trick, so he could sit in his fishing seat and try to reel in an albacore or barracuda for the table.

"Ever taken a trip this long on a schooner?"

"The closest I've ever been to a schooner was at Joe's Bar & Grill."

"You'll enjoy the trip," he said. "I been hanging around boats for ten years—since I was fifteen—and I never saw a boat as sweet as this."

"You're pretty young to have first mate's papers."

"That's a laugh. The skipper calls me that, and treats me like it. But I'm a seagoing bum, period."

He went back to the briefing then, and he was showing me how to lash the wheel when a girl came aboard. I saw her before he did; she walked along the float with a long clean stride, and she was wearing white shorts and the air of easy self-confidence that you get with a figure like hers. When she came over the side Madden looked up and greeted her casually.

She smiled and said, "Hi. Everybody aboard?"

"Just me and Mr. Bailey here. This is Betty Callister, Mr. Bailey—the skipper's daughter."

She looked at me with a puzzled frown and said, "You're . . . I don't understand. Dad said he'd known you in business for over twenty years." She paused and added dryly, "You must have started young."

I wasn't sure, but I thought Madden looked at me sharply. I said, "The business used to belong to my father."

"Well, I think it was nasty of Dad not to prepare me for you. Where's Mrs. Bailey?"

"Did he tell you I was married?"

"As a matter of fact, he didn't."

"Then it's safe to tell you," I grinned. "I'm not."

"Maybe not so safe, either. A bachelor aboard. This is absolutely revolutionary."

"Oh? What category do you put me in?" Owen asked lightly.

Betty threw him a quizzical glance and drawled, "Now you don't want me to answer that, do you, Owen?"

And with that she turned and went below, leaving us standing there with nothing to say.

The morning was gone, the sun was high and hot, and the Callisters still hadn't put in an appearance. So I walked up to the Anchorage Café and had some lunch at a pale green table overlooking the Navy yard across the way. I was just finishing the third cup of coffee and wondering if I should take time for another when Betty Callister came in, glanced around, and walked over.

She sat down without being asked, and the proprietor came around from behind the counter, saying, "Salutations, Miss Callister. What can I get you?"

"Just some tea, Harry."

"And I'll have another coffee," I said.

"Maybe I oughta just put the urn on the table," Harry said. "This is your fifth, ain't it?"

Betty shuddered. "How much of that stuff do you drink a day?"

"Never more than twenty cups."

"Doesn't it keep you awake? Twenty cups?"

"Well, it helps."

Betty laughed generously at that.

"Your father and mother arrive yet?" I asked, after Harry had served us.

"Don't let Eilene hear you call her that.

You'll walk the plank. No, they haven't."

I waited for her to get started. She certainly hadn't come up for tea—she hadn't even bothered to pour any into the cup.

After a while, she said abruptly, "What's this all about, Mr. Bailey?"

"What?"

"This trip."

"How do you mean?"

"That's what I'm asking you. Several days ago Dad said an old business acquaintance of his would be going along—a man he'd known for twenty years or more. That was why I couldn't go this time, he told me."

She was waiting for me, but I didn't say anything.

"Then you turn up. I'll give you ten dollars for every year you're over thirty."

"Want to pay me the twenty bucks now, ma'am, or later?"

She grimaced and said, "I'm serious. Dad always takes me on trips, no matter what. This time I had to threaten to do something horrible before he'd agree to let me go. Why? If you're an old business acquaintance, I'm Minnie Mouse."

"Well, Minnie, my relationship with your father is just what he said—business. We expect to work out a very important deal on this trip."

"You sound like you're telling the truth."

"I am."

She looked at me almost searchingly for a long moment, then seemed to relax. "Then—we might be seeing a lot of you—Dad, I mean."

"That depends on how the deal goes," I said, and almost choked on it.

"What's your first name?"

"Stuart."

"Mind if I call you that?"

"If we have to be formal."

"Well, mine's Betty, Stuart, and I think we should be getting back."

"Shall we take your tea with us?"

She laughed and said, "Never touch the stuff."

She had a nice laugh, easy and soft, and it did wonderful things to her face, putting a dimple into one cheek, deepening its warmth and color, and darkening the already dark blue eyes. Anyway, that's how it hit me as I stood there looking at her and hunting vaguely through my pockets for some change.

At three o'clock I was in my cabin putting things away. The door was closed because one of the things I had to put away was my .38 automatic and I was having trouble finding a likely spot for it. I finally settled for one of my shoes, and was just pushing a sock down over it when the Callisters arrived.

I stood up quickly, listening to the sound of their steps on the companionway. I heard a soft voice with just a touch of the lately-acquired in the accent saying, "Come on down, Owen. We're having a few Martinis first."

A moment later Callister's rumbling baritone echoed from the lounge with "Where's Bailey? Hasn't Bailey . . . ?" Apparently, Betty broke into the question with the news that I was aboard and in my cabin, because five seconds later there was a brisk knock on the door.

Callister was standing there smiling broadly, a high flush darkening the pink of his face to a kind of lobster red. He seemed glad to see me. He clapped me on the back as I stepped out into the passage and asked heartily, "How d'you like your Martinis, Bailey?"

"With whiskey and soda," I said as we stepped into the lounge.

Callister got a big bang out of that and he stood there laughing, one hand on my shoulder, while I waited for him to introduce me to the blonde.

She was standing in the center of the room, giving me one of those terribly-at-ease goings-over—the chatelaine inspecting the peasants on festival day. She was a small woman with a round face, large brown eyes, and silver-blond

hair. She may have been only thirty or so, and she thought she looked a good deal less, but there was something about the well-watched figure, the too carefully made-up face, that suggested the dark side of thirty-five. But beyond everything else she was a woman, and one who would never forget it for a moment. She would be making the most of it when people were wondering which side of fifty she was on.

In the meantime Callister had managed to say the right words, and Eilene stepped forward and held out her hand, a little as if trying to make up for the going-over. She smiled slowly and gave me a look that went just a wee bit beyond the ordinary amenities of introduction. The way she clasped my hand was brief and proper, but she somehow managed to convey the impression of having held hands with me.

Betty, standing over at the bar, said, "How do you like your Martinis, Stuart?" Mrs. Callister raised an eyebrow at the "Stuart" and Callister stole my joke: "With whiskey and soda," he chortled, and stepped over to the bar to make me a highball.

Still looking over her shoulder at me, Betty said, "Among other things, I had to agree to be galley rat, pot-walloper, and bartender, to be invited on this jaunt."

I started to reply, but Eilene stepped over, very casually got between me and Betty, and said, "Ever taken a trip like this before, Mr. Bailey?"

"No," I said, and curbed the impulse to ask, "Who has?"

Callister put the highball in my hand and Owen brought over two Martinis and gave them to the Callisters. Betty brought two more and gave one to Owen, and we were all standing there with drinks in our hands waiting for somebody to do the obvious thing.

Callister raised his glass, said, "Well, *bon voyage*, everyone," chuckled happily, and drank. Everybody joined him heartily, including Stuart Bailey, who didn't think for a minute he could keep the old boy from being given the deep six if anyone in this happy party had a mind to try it.

I was leaning back in the cockpit letting Iron Mike do the work for me, wondering whether this was the fourth or fifth day out, and watching the sun stain the water as it began its nightly drop into the drink.

Callister had just gone below after coming up to ask me if I was sure I didn't want a scotch and soda, "... even if you are driving, hah, hah!" He also wanted to tell me Eilene had been asking questions about me. He had told her I was a big manufacturer of experimental equipment. "That stopped her," he said, and followed it with his characteristic deep-bellied laughter. For a man who expected to be killed, Callister was having himself a great time.

Steps sounded on the companionway, and Eilene Callister stepped out onto the deck with a double Martini glass in one hand and the hem of her white evening gown in the other. She walked toward me, picking her steps, because she was also wearing high heels, stepped down into the cockpit, and put herself carefully beside me with the air of one bringing largess. What she had brought was a heady odor of perfume that went very badly with the sea air.

I wondered if she had planned it this way, waiting until the failing light could give her face a kind of golden warmth and take all trace of hardness from it.

She said, very softly, "May I keep you company, Stuart?"

"Sure. I was beginning to feel neglected."

She looked at me from the corners of her eyes, smiled wryly, and said, "Believe me, if—if things were different, I'd see that you were never neglected."

That wasn't very subtle, and I looked at her sharply and realized, seeing it in the set of her head and the careful (Continued on page 150)



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## Death and the Skylark

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raising of her glass, that Eilene was, as Owen might have put it, "primed to the Plimsoll mark." Anyway, she was a little drunk. I didn't say anything, and after a while she drew closer, turned toward me a bit more, and said, in a little-girl tone of confidence, "Know why I like you?"

"No. Why do you like me?" "Because you're modest. You never talk about yourself. My husband's been telling me about you."

"Always smarter to let the other fellow talk for you."

She smiled, looked at me, let the smile slowly go, and just sat there. After a moment she put down the Martini and folded her hands in her lap, and went on looking and waiting for me to get started. Finally, she said, whispering now, "You know, there's another reason why I like you."

"What's that?"

"Can't you guess?"

"Because I'm a man?"

Silence. And then she laughed a little, but it was strained and a trifle flat. She said, "That wasn't very funny. It's because... well, you respect the fact that I'm married. Believe me, any other man in the world would have been trying to kiss me by now."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Callister. I'll try to do better next time."

Silence again; only this time it threatened to be permanent. "Are you," she finally managed in a tiny voice, "being deliberately rude to me?"

"Well, now that you mention it..."

That's as far as I got. Owen suddenly appeared in the open companionway, his eyes peering fixedly into the growing darkness around the cockpit. He stepped out onto the deck, and Betty followed him, saying, "Thought we'd get some air. Owen's idea."

Owen scowled at her and walked over to the rail without saying anything or looking toward us.

"Well, if you'll excuse me," Eilene's tone was definitely cold now, unfriendly, and she picked up her Martini and disappeared with it below decks.

Betty came over and sat down beside me. "Hmmm. Hope we didn't interrupt anything." She said it loudly enough for Owen to hear, and I glanced at her in faint surprise. There was more of the wench in Betty than I'd thought.

Owen turned suddenly and went below without a word.

"That'll be cozy. They're alone at last. Dad's in his cabin lying down."

"Take over for a second. Be right back," I said.

The door to the lounge was closed. I stepped over to Callister's stateroom door and listened. After a moment I heard the sound of his heavy breathing and turned to go down to the lounge door. I listened there too, but there was no sound at all from inside.

I quickly opened the door and

stepped in. They literally sprang to their feet from the couch. Owen's mouth was smeared red and Eilene's face was grey beneath the garish color of her make-up.

"Sorry," I said. "We ran out of matches." I crossed to the bar, picked up a book of matches, and started back. I took two steps, and Owen suddenly came to life, moving forward with one long stride and driving a drop-hammer fist into my face.

I went down like a weight and came up with a grunting whoosh of sound against the refrigerator. He was standing over me with fire in his eye and both fists balled like a pair of brass capstans. "You didn't come down here for matches," he breathed, "and we both know it."

I didn't say anything. He was right, of course, and in a way I didn't really blame him. I hadn't liked doing it, but I had hoped to open the door on exactly that, in the vague hope that my having seen them might give one of them pause, might even change whatever plans had been made.

"How about stepping back a couple of feet," I said, "so I can get all the way up?"

He didn't move, so I didn't either, and after a minute of that Eilene stepped over in front of him and whispered something I didn't quite get; he shook his head, but finally he moved, turning his back to me. Eilene turned and watched warily as I got to my feet. She put out a hand to my arm.

"Will you do me a great favor, Mr. Bailey? I'm asking it as your hostess. Go back up on deck. And please forget what happened. Will you?"

"Tell him to say 'please.'"

Eilene stiffened as she heard Owen swing round again to glare at me. "Please, Mr. Bailey," she whispered.

"You got it wrong. He says 'please.'"

She just stood there, her eyes moving from my left eye to my right and back to my left. "You're being childish."

"Sure, I'm just a big kid at heart. Tell him to say 'please.'"

There was a little more of the Whimbleton movement with her eyes, and she swung round to Owen. "Owen," she said, tightly, "I don't want this to go on a second longer. I mean it. Do what he says."

Owen stared at her, and whatever it was he saw in her face carried authority, because he finally looked up at me, wet his lips, and said, "Please," in a tone that would have cut diamonds.

I went back up on deck and sat down again at the wheel.

"Everything all right below?"

"Shipsshape."

"Cigarette?"

"Not right now."

"What's the matter?"

"Not a thing."

"Then you won't mind answer-

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## Death and the Skylark

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ing a few questions, will you, Stu?"

"Love to."

"I should warn you that anything you say may be held against you."

"It usually is. What's on your mind?"

"You, as usual. But don't get me wrong. I'm not an Eilene. I find you quite resistible, in a nice way."

"I didn't have any comment."

"You said you and Dad were going to close a big deal on this trip."

"Uh-huh."

"Funny he doesn't know about it. You were lying."

"All right, I was lying."

There was an abrupt pause, and after a moment she said in a tone of surprise, "Well, we're getting somewhere. Has it something to do with Owen and Eilene? Are you a lawyer or something?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Please. You know what Eilene is, and Owen's all gone on her. I'm sure Dad knows about it."

"Seems to me he's the happiest human aboard."

"I know," she whispered. "It's made me wonder. Maybe he doesn't know."

"Maybe there's nothing to know."

"Look, I'm all grown up now, and I'm waiting for an answer."

"Why I'm aboard?"

"Yes."

"Ask your father."

"I'm asking you."

"And I'm not answering. Ask him."

"I can't. He never talks to me. To Dad I'm still 11 years old. He treated Mother the same way." She sounded almost bitter.

"Do me a favor, will you, Betty?"

She nodded earnestly.

"Don't ask any more questions till we hit Honolulu. I might answer them then."

"There's nothing I can do to persuade you to tell me now?"

"You might try offering your fair young body. I'd probably break down."

"I doubt that very much... All right, I'll wait, Stu, and—thanks for being honest with me at last."

I looked at her. She was lost in something out there across the bow of the ship. It had grown dark now and her profile was etched softly against the moonlight. I felt a sudden tightening at my throat. This could turn out to be a pretty rugged journey for Betty. Why had Callister allowed her to come?

She turned back to me and smiled slowly. "I knew you were looking at me," she whispered. "I think it's the first time you have—really looked, I mean."

"It's the second. I still like it."

"Did Eilene make a pass at you?"

"No."

"You're very kind. Did it work?"

"No."

"I didn't think it would. Well,

Guess I'll go down and make with the scuffings—that's sea talk for show."

"Take it easy on the salt."

"Yes, sir. Easy on the salt. Is your name really Bailey? And are you really not married?"

"Yes, sweet. I'm really not. No more questions."

She made a face at me and got up and went below. And after she'd gone I realized I was alone up there with a million square miles of ocean all around me.

With the exception of a brief but violent squall on about the eleventh day, life aboard the *Skylark* settled down and became singularly uneventful and uneasily pleasant. Eilene and her friend Owen behaved as if the little episode in the lounge had never happened. Generally we sat around on deck or in the lounge and talked at great length about everything but politics, religion, and ourselves. Now and then Betty would play the piano or Owen would pick up his guitar and sing sea chanteys in an off-key baritone. And there was nearly always fresh fish from Callister's morning vigil in the fishing seat.

The squall came up while I was on watch, appearing suddenly off to the southeast—a great swirling bank of black cloud filling the horizon, picking up giant waves and dropping rain as it roared down on us.

I shouted for help and hoped I was doing the right thing when I turned the ship into the wind and lashed the wheel. Betty was on deck first, pulling me with her toward the bow, and shouting something about jibs that I either didn't hear or couldn't understand. By the time Callister and Owen appeared the squall was on top of us, and Betty, howling orders at me, had my full attention. We clawed and pulled at the crazed sails and finally, bruised and soaked to the skin, got them lashed tight with gaskets.

I couldn't see what was going on in the stern and started back there when Betty shouted, "No! Down this way!"

"Gotta give 'em a hand!"

"You'll be in the way! It's a..." The ship lurched sickeningly, and Betty went down on the bucking, rain-washed deck. I stopped arguing and helped her down the forward hatch.

Eilene was sitting in the lounge, clutching the couch with knotted hands, her eyes sick with fear. Betty had stopped off at her cabin to change, and I went on through without a word and started up the companionway. I stopped because Owen came stumbling down, clutching his left arm. He careened against the door of the head, opened it, pulled out a towel, wrapped the towel around his arm, and made his way into the lounge.

I followed him in and asked,

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## Death and the Skylark

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"Where's Callister?" putting more sharpness into it than I had intended.

He was standing there holding the reddening towel. He looked at me, surprised, and said, "Reefing the jib. Why?" He sent down under a light.

I turned without saying anything and started out, but the door jerked open and Callister charged in, carrying a first-aid kit. He dropped his slicker onto the rug and stepped over beside Owen.

I stood there looking at him with infinite relief, realizing for the first time that I had become fond of the little man with the big laugh. I had expected never to see him again, not in this world anyway, and I had to get used to the idea that he was still alive and that Madden had skipped a fine opportunity to kill him. But then again, maybe Owen hadn't had the opportunity. Squalls have a way of keeping you wrapped up in the business at hand.

Callister had attended to Owen's arm and was putting a bandage neatly around it. He said, "Maybe this'll teach you to secure those stays a little better, especially the ones with blocks on 'em."

"Yeah," Owen said, and glowered at Betty as she stepped into the room.

Callister grinned, gave the arm a final pat, and said, "Relax. That'll be healed by tomorrow."

"You're sure of that, huh?" Owen said skeptically.

"Yep. It's because you're young. But don't think me envious, Owen. Being old has its compensations."

Owen stood up and asked unpleasantly, "Yeah? What are they?"

Callister chuckled and said, "Well, for one thing, you don't have so long to live."

The remark was greeted by a dead silence, and Eilene broke in to it almost harshly with, "Well! Let's get this party on its feet! I'll mix 'em myself!"

Half an hour later the squall had blown itself out and the party was on its feet. Betty was at the piano, Owen was strumming along with her on the guitar, and Callister was on the couch with Eilene beside him holding one of his broad hands in both of hers. I was leaning against the bulkhead next to the piano, looking at all this and wondering what I was doing there.

And the next morning Olen Callister was shot through the back of the head.

My alarm was set for seven-thirty that morning because I was taking the eight o'clock watch, but something woke me about seven o'clock and I looked up, expecting to see Owen up there in his sprawled sleep. His bed was empty.

I threw off the covers, pulled on my denims and shirt, shoved

my feet into my tennis shoes, and stepped out into the passage. The lounge doors were both open and I could see Madden down in the galley adjusting the oil valve on the stove.

I walked in, and he glanced up, scowled at me, and offered the usual greeting in a tone that made it sound like, "Drop dead."

"What are you doing up at this hour?" I said.

He held a finger to his lips and gestured at Betty's door directly behind him. "It's this damned arm," he whispered. "Want some coffee?"

"The Old Man up on deck?"

"It's his watch. I'd say he was there."

"Pour two. I'll take him up some."

"Okay. Won't be ready for a while."

I walked back to the head, undressed, showered, dressed again, and came out to find that the coffee still wasn't ready, so I went back down to the companionway and up onto the deck.

Callister was sitting there, strapped in the fishing seat, as usual, the pole in its socket, the line stretched out in the *Skylark's* wake. But this time he didn't throw me his usual derisive, "Good afternoon!" He didn't do anything at all, because he was dead.

It was what I had been told was to happen, it was the sole reason I was here, but somehow I wasn't ready. In some way, perhaps because of last night, or because of his perpetually cheerful attitude, I'd come to believe he'd been wrong that first day on the *Skylark*.

I reached out and touched the soft flesh below his ear. There was warmth there still, but no pulse of life. I picked up the heavy wrist and held it for a long while. Nothing there but the yielding softness and fleeting warmth that told me it had been only a little while. An hour? Or only ten minutes? Why was the body still aboard? Because I had awakened too early and broken into the middle of things? Or was it Madden who had awakened too early?

And then I noticed something significant. I hadn't been looking for it and probably wouldn't have thought of looking for it. But it was obvious enough. The bullet had come out in the center of his forehead, and had gone in an inch lower at the back of his head. I let my eyes follow back along the line the bullet must have traveled. The gun had been held low, and at an upward angle.

I started slowly forward, and, more than fifty feet away, lodged behind the anchor and near the rail, I found it—a slender .30-.30 rifle equipped with a custom-made silencer. It was lying there, as if it had been dropped—or thrown. I glanced to the left. The rifle

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## Death and the Skylark

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was on a line with the open forward hatch.

I looked back at Callister and traced an imaginary trajectory from here to the stern, where the old man, his white head bare, sat and grew cold in the warm sun of the morning. I got an ugly picture of someone rising up from the forward hatch, lifting the rifle, and resting it on the ledge. That would give the trajectory, all right. I could see this blank-faced someone, perhaps in panicked haste, throw the gun over the rail. I could see it hit the rail, hold for a moment, and fall back behind the anchor. It must have been there that the plan had been stopped. Had I stopped it? Or had Madden?

"Hey, Bailey, what gives?" It was Madden, looking up at me through the galley skylight. "You want coffee up there?"

"No, I'm coming down."

I lowered myself down the forward hatch, stopped into the galley, and watched Owen pour steaming coffee into an oversized mug. "Doesn't he want some moko?" he asked.

"No, he doesn't."

"Too bad. This morning it tastes like coffee. Made it myself."

"I heard that!" It was Betty's voice, and in a moment her door opened and she came out tying her robe around her. I had seen her hair looking better in a high wind, but otherwise she was her usual dew-bright self.

"A little more respect and quiet around here for the graveyard shift," she said. "Suppose there's enough hot water for a shower?"

"Bailey had one, and he's a very big man," Owen said.

"I took it cold."

"Oh, Spartan, huh?" Betty remarked, squeezing past Owen to step into the lounge and go on down to the shower room. I took the mug of coffee Owen had poured for me and walked over to one of the lounges. Owen followed me in and sat down, leaning back on one elbow.

"What woke you up this morning?" I said. "Anything special?"

"I answered that once already. The arm."

"You didn't hear anything?"

"Yeah, I thought I heard the Old Man in the galley. Why?"

I didn't say anything.

"Say, what's eating you, Bailey?"

I heard the door at the end of the passageway open, and Eilene appeared in a flowing, ice-blue negligee. She had been up for quite a while, because when she breezed on over and sat down under the glare of the skylight I could see that her make-up was no haphazard job.

"I could smell the coffee, Owen, and I knew you'd made it," she purred. "Pour me some?"

"Sure."

Owen went into the galley.

Eilene smiled at me and said,

"Why don't you go up and drag Glen away from that fishing pole? I feel like making breakfast myself this morning."

"Sure," I said. "I'll go up in a second."

Owen came back with two coffees, the extra one for Betty. I gathered. She had turned off the shower and was singing *Venezuela* at the top of her voice.

Eilene looked at Owen warily and asked, "How's the man?"

"Lousy, thanks."

Betty came in with her hair combed and her face gleaming like a boy soprano, looking a lot less prepared for what was coming than I had ever seen. Owen gave her the coffee and she sat down beside me. Eilene turned to me again, a bit impatiently now, and said, "Won't you go up and . . ."

"I was just up there," I interrupted. "He can't come down. Someone shot him, Mrs. Callister. He's dead."

Eilene stared at me as if I had said something that didn't make sense. She suddenly turned her eyes to Owen and dropped the hot mug of coffee onto the soft grey carpet. I felt a quick movement beside me, and Betty was on her feet, running blindly from the room. I waited for something more from the lovers, but Owen just stood there giving Eilene back her stare and saying nothing at all. Finally Eilene dropped her eyes to the brown stain at her feet and looked at it as if it were the most important event of the day. Owen put his mug aside and took hold of both her arms in a tight and steady grip. I got up and walked out of the room.

Betty was up there holding on to the stern rail and looking in dry-eyed wonder and despair at the little man sitting with the pole clutched in his right hand, still waiting for a strike. The wind was blowing gently at his soft white hair and the seat moved slowly with the rolling of the boat.

I didn't go to her, but stepped over to the closed skylight over the lounge and leaned down at its edge where my shadow would fall away from the glass. I could hear a frantic sibilance of voices from below, but neither words nor meaning.

The voices stopped and I moved away, going to Betty and stepping between her and the figure in the chair. After a moment she looked up without really seeing me, and I put an arm around her and drew her away. At the companionway she stopped. "They did it," she choked. "They killed him."

"Betty, listen. Maybe not 'they.' Maybe just one, without the other." Owen was coming up the steps, followed with slow reluctance by Eilene. "Get hold of yourself," I said.

We stepped aside and Owen walked over to the body and picked up the left wrist, fumbling clumsily for a pulse. Eilene didn't

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## Death and the Skylark

Continued from page 167

come up all the way, just far enough to see him there; then she turned away, her face twisted in an ugly grimace.

Owen dropped the wrist and looked over at me.

"He was shot with a .30-.30," I said. "It's forward behind the anchor, where I found it."

Owen just went on looking at me with a pale fixity for what seemed a long while. "I know Eilene didn't do this," he said with careful deliberation. "She just told me. And I know Betty wouldn't, couldn't. I also know I didn't. That leaves you Hailey. I'm putting you under arrest."

"You're . . ." I wanted to laugh in his face, but somehow the face didn't seem to belong to a kid in his twenties, but to a man, and one who wouldn't go in for loose threats or idle talk.

"Yes," he said. "The captain of the ship is dead. I'm captain now, and responsible for the other passengers. We don't know you, but there's been something phony from the start about your connection with the skipper. I'm going to lock you in your cabin till we hit port. If you try to resist, I've got a right to kill you."

And he meant every word of it.

"Look, Owen, you're in deep enough already. Don't make it any tougher. I've got a letter down in my cabin, from the dead captain. Maybe you ought to read it before you do anything rash."

He thought about that, looking at me and waiting for me to go on.

"Or maybe I'll just tell you what it says. It's an offer of a job—to go along on this tea party. I'm a licensed private investigator. The letter states that you and the . . . But maybe you'd rather read it, after all."

"Go ahead. It states what?"

"That you and Mrs. Callister were having an illicit affair, and that one of you, on this trip, intended to kill him."

I could feel the hysteria building and threatening to break in the girl at my side. I took hold of Betty's hand and gripped it tightly.

"Where is this letter?" It was Eilene, her voice sounding suddenly very odd.

"I'll get it for you if you want to see it. As long as our new captain here understands I don't intend to let him have it."

"It doesn't matter," Eilene said wearily. "It would be like him to do a thing like that."

"I want to see that letter," Owen said. "It doesn't make sense to me."

But Eilene didn't seem to have heard him. She went on, turning her eyes toward Betty. "There's the one who killed him. Right there."

I felt Betty stiffen with a quick hard movement, but she made no other move, said nothing. Eilene began to speak, looking at Betty, but talking to us, the tone rising

slowly and sharpening viciously as she went on:

"Two days ago Glen and I came to a complete understanding—about . . . everything." In the brief pause her eyes had gone to Owen for a moment, then back to Betty. "We talked all through one night, and Glen finally told me he had cut me out of his will—left me one dirty dollar. But before the night was over he'd promised to change it back again. I made the mistake of telling Betty about it. I had to crow a little. And it cost—"

"That's a lie!" Betty's words burst out with cold fury and contempt. "This is the first I've ever heard of—"

"Cut it?" It was Owen's turn to interrupt now. "We'll be in Honolulu in three days and the cops'll decide the question of guilt." He paused and looked at each of us. This was Owen in his new role, and I had to admit, grudgingly, that he played it well, with a genuine ring of authority.

"Meanwhile," he went on, "we have a burial service to perform."

"Wait a minute! You can't send him over the side."

"Listen, mister," Owen said, looking at me as if I had just stepped up from steerage. "We're at least three hot days out of port. We have a dead man aboard. We're burying him. There's a book on sea law below. Maybe you ought to read it."

"Okay," I said. "It's two funerals—his and yours."

He started to answer when Betty suddenly choked. She was standing there frozen, staring in blank unholly terror at the body of Glen Callister. I looked at the same moment, as Glen Callister's right hand, clapping the rail, shot up stiffly, his body lurched forward, hung there for a terrifying moment of sheer madness, and slumped back as the pole left his hand with a jar of sound and disappeared into the sea.

And over all this came the shrill, mad screaming of Eilene Callister.

Glen Clarence Callister was buried at sea. ". . . We, therefore, commit this body to the deep to be turned into corruption, looking for the resurrection of the body when the ~~we~~ shall give up her soul and the life of the world to come . . ."

Owen Muddon read the words in an awkward tempo, but with quiet conviction. Eilene cried silently, but with copious great tears, while Betty stood by with taut face and eyes as dry and hot as desert stones.

For two days Eilene and Owen cloistered themselves from time to time in the master's cabin, and quarreled. Their voices were low and guarded, but the passion and the pleading somehow carried even though the world did not.

On the last day before we made

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## Death and the Skylark

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port the quarreling stopped, completely, as if with the turning of a switch. It was late afternoon and I was at the wheel when I realized I had heard nothing from them for the entire day. The Skylark was in her Sunday best, and I sat there smoking and listening to her speak. The last time she had moved through the water this way, throwing up foam at her bow, Callister had said she was carrying a bone in her teeth. She was carrying it with a vengeance today, as if she had scented the slip at Oahu.

There was a sound from below, and I knew Betty would be coming up in a moment to take over, and I would be seeing her for the first time that day. Whatever she was required to do, Betty Callister did, but the rest of the time she stayed in her cabin, the door locked. When you knocked, she answered. When you told her you just wanted to talk, she answered with silence.

Her steps sounded on the companionway and in a moment she walked out onto the deck and came over to the cockpit. She stepped down into it and stood there waiting for me to get up.

"Sit down," I said.

She sat down and I got out my cigarettes and offered her one. She shook her head and I lit one from the one in my mouth, snapped the butt away, and blew smoke over my left shoulder.

"Did you want to say something?" she asked quietly.

"Only that the longer you let a thing like this ride you, the longer it takes to get clear of it."

"Dad's dead, and there's nothing I can do to bring him back. I'm not letting it ride me."

"That's good."

There was another silence and I was wondering how to get past it when Betty said, "I just can't stand being on this boat with her, that's all. If I don't stay in my room, I—I don't know what I might do."

"You're sure it's Eilene now, huh?"

"Of course. Why else would she cook up that business about Dad's will?"

"Maybe it's the truth—that is, the part about the will."

"I hope so. But she didn't tell me about it."

"Maybe she said it just to protect Owen."

"Then they're both in it."

"I doubt it."

"I don't want to talk about it."

"Okay," I said, "but I've been curious about something. Didn't you hear the shot?"

"How could I when there was a cleaver on the gun?"

"How did you know that?"

She looked at me steadily for a moment and said, just as steadily, "Because I saw the gun when Owen brought it below."

"I just wondered if Owen had gone out of his way to tell you."

"I don't think that's what you

were wondering at all. I think you believe Eilene. She hasn't drawn an honest breath for fifteen years, but you believed her."

"Are you saying I think you killed your father?"

She turned and faced me, drawing a sharp breath to say something, and suddenly changed her mind. I could see the pale drawn tension in her face now, the terrible loneliness in her eyes.

She turned away again and said, "It's time for me to take over."

"Okay, you've taken over."

"Please, I . . ." And then, for what was possibly the first time since sudden death had overtaken Glen Callister, his daughter began to cry. I sat there for a bit before I put a tentative hand to her shoulder. She didn't draw away, and when she spoke the words were muffled. She said, "Please. Go below, I'll be all right."

And it was plain enough that Betty meant just that. I went below.

Eilene and Owen were both in the lounge. Eilene was mixing a drink, Owen was picking at his guitar, and the tension in the room was even more obvious than the silence. I stepped over to the bar and poured myself a glass of ice water, sat down with it, and looked up at Eilene. She turned and walked out of the room, and in a moment her stateroom door closed with flat emphasis.

I glanced at Owen and said, "Seems upset. Anything I can do?"

He told me exactly what I could do.

After another round of silence he shut his fingers sharply across the strings with a discordant whang of sound and toward the guitar across the room. It landed safely on the other couch. "Gimme a cigarette, will you?"

I gave him a cigarette and watched him light it. He dragged deeply, pulled some of the smoke tentatively into his lungs, and blew it out quickly in a white plume.

"What happens when we bit port?" he asked. "Who does what to who?"

"I thought you knew all about sea law."

"Okay, so I don't."

"The Skylark's an American-registered ship, isn't she?"

"Sure."

"The F.B.I. handle the investigation and the U. S. Attorney in Honolulu tries the case."

"Why? Why not the local authorities?"

"Did it happen locally?"

"Who do they try? All four of us?"

"Just the guilty party."

"And who might that be?"

"Don't you know?"

He scowled at the cigarette, stood up, and walked to the bar to put it out. He stood there with his back to me for what seemed

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## Death and the Skylark

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a long time, and then he wheeled abruptly.

"Jesus, Bailey. I'm in love with her. I suppose that makes me a prime heel, but there it is. I'm in love with her, and there's nothing I can do about it." He was staring down at me with a wide-open look of confusion and despair, and I found myself wondering at the changes that can come over a man, or a face. The raw toughness and the maturity of two days ago had fallen away, and once again Owen Madden's face belonged to a kid not long past twenty.

"I'm in love with her and she knows it," he was saying. "Why won't she admit it to me?"

"Admit what?" I asked, and I could feel my lips getting dry as I waited for his answer.

He blinked once and looked down at me as if I had just reminded him of something important. He turned and began to mix himself a drink. His hands were trembling. I got up and shut the door that led to the passage and stepped over to mix a drink for myself, being careful to keep it reasonably nonalcoholic.

Two hours later, I was on my eighth drink and ruddy sober. Owen was on his ninth, and just cold. He had taken on the erect, slow-moving, studied air of a man who likes to think of himself as blessed with an unlimited capacity. As Owen had put it while working on drink number seven, "I can get canned to the crow's-nest and y'd never know it."

Well, he was cannoned to the crow's-nest and carrying three red lights, but I still hadn't managed to get him back onto the subject. I was about to give up out of sheer caution—after all, he would have to take us into port in the morning—when suddenly he leaned toward me and said, as if we'd been there all evening, "Sure, it made me sick inside first, knowing she could kill a man like that. But I don't care now. Don't care about anything but Eilene 'cause I'm in love with her and wanta . . . An' she's in love me. Crazy for me. . . ."

He took an untidy swallow and got lost in his thoughts for a while. This time I didn't try to steer him anywhere at all.

"But why won't she admit, huh, Bailey? Can't live with a woman something like that between you. Can you now?"

"Course not. Won't she admit it?"

He shook his head miserably. "Fact, she keeps yapping at me admit I did it myself. Can you beat that?"

I said, trying to make it sound as casual as asking for a match, "And did you do it?"

His eyes opened a little wider and almost focused on me. "Hell no, she did! That's what I been trying tell you. And I don't care! If she'd only tell me!" He was shouting now. "If she just look

at me and say, 'Yes, I did it. For you.' Then it—"

He broke off abruptly as the door slammed open behind me. I turned to see Eilene standing there in what must have been her thinniest. She was glaring hotly across the room at Owen, her neck corded with tension, her fists clenched. And when she spoke the sound was like a file against an edge of glass: "You filthy coward. You filthy, lying, murdering coward. I could have killed him, Owen. For you. Now I wouldn't walk across the room for you. Not if you were dying. I hope you hang for what you did!"

She turned and went back to her stateroom, leaving Owen staring blankly at the empty darkness framed by the doorway. And she left me seeing the answer to everything, clearly, completely.

It was mid-morning of the fifteenth day of the *Skylark's* singular journey when Diamond Head bove into view.

I found an American flag in the chartroom and took it up on deck. Owen was at the wheel. "I'm going to run it up," I said. "Upside down, so we'll get the quarantine officers out here before we hit port. Any objections, Captain?"

"Nope."

I ran the flag up in distress signal position and Owen eyed the operation silently. "Is the gun still aboard?" I said, "or did you bury it with the captain?"

"It's aboard."

"Where?"

"Wrapped in a sheet and put away."

"Wrapped. . . . Brother, they're going to love you. If there were ever any fingerprints, they're gone now." He made some kind of an answer to that, but I didn't hear it. I had to talk to Betty and time was running out.

It was to be my show from here on, but I can't say that my heart was really in it. Glen Callister had hired me, had paid me five hundred honest dollars, and I hadn't succeeded in talking myself out of the idea that I owed him something. Betty was the first step, and I was pretty sure she would also be the toughest.

I found her in the lounge, sitting at the piano, running her fingers aimlessly over the keys.

"Where's Eilene?" I asked.

"In her stateroom, I suppose."

I closed the door and sat down, waiting a moment in the hope that she would get it started. But she went on playing a simple, melancholy melody that she seemed to like.

I said, "I'd like to talk to you a minute, Betty."

She let the melody fade off into nothing and turned to look at me without saying anything.

"We'll all be under arrest pretty soon. We'll be asked to make statements. If they decide to

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## Death and the Skylark

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raise a murder charge against one of us, we'll all be over here for months. Do you know that?"

"I suppose we will."

"What kind of a statement are you going to make?"

"How do you mean? The truth, of course."

"What's the truth? And I'm not waxing philosophical."

"Then why ask?"

"Because I'd like to know what you think it is."

"That Dad knew one of them intended to kill him. That he told you so, and hired you to..."

"But he didn't."

"What?"

"I said he didn't."

"But the letter..."

"There isn't any letter."

She didn't say anything.

"Our friend Owen was threatening to lock me up. I just dreamed up the letter to cool him down."

"You're not a detective?"

"Yes, in California. I'm not licensed to play sleuth on the high seas."

She thought that over, and I could see that she didn't like what it added up to. With an air of faint disgust, she said, "Do detectives post bonds? Big cash bonds?"

"Yeah," I said, "they do."

"And you'd forfeit it for operating outside California."

"Possibly."

"You're a wonderful example of fine citizenship, aren't you? You might lose a little money, so let's fix it, let's allow two corrupt, contemptible..."

"Listen, Betty, this is the story I'm going to tell: Your father hired me sometime ago to find out if there was anything between his wife and Owen Madden. I found there wasn't, and we became friends. That's why I was on the trip—as a friend."

Betty stood up, staring at me with an expression compounded of cold contempt and fear. "And if you tell them that, and Eilene tells her story about the will, they—they might even—"

"Yes, they might. But I can get Eilene to forget that story—at least that she told you about it. But you'll have to forget what you think about Owen and her."

Slowly she crossed the room and sat down, not looking at me. "All this," she whispered, "lying, conning, just to avoid being held up on an island for a while, just to hold onto a grubby way of making a living." She looked at me. "It's funny how wrong you can be about people."

I didn't say anything.

"Well, I won't do it. I know they were lovers. I've seen them together. I've seen her going down to the Skylark when Dad was out of town."

I came across the room and sat down beside her. "Okay, Betty, it's a mess then—for all of us. We'll all pay through the nose, but not one of us will ever pay the price they put on murder; there's

too much evidence against the three of you, and not half enough against one."

She shook her head in puzzlement and disbelief, her eyes searching my face. "For the three of us," she whispered, "maybe lying is worth it. But for you it's cheap. It's cheap and—and I don't know. Is there a word for people like you, who can look at murder the way some people look at a traffic violation?"

"Cheap will do until you think of a better word. The quarantine launch will be alongside any minute. Are you going to do it my way?"

"Sorry, no."

"Baby, you just haven't any choice. When I tell them I tailed those two and found there wasn't anything between them, your story's going to look like nothing but an alibi."

"I'll take my chance."

"Then I'd better take the ace out of my sleeve. That rido was fired from the forward hatch, just two feet from where you sleep. Do you think they'll believe anyone else would go up there to do it?"

"How do you know where it was fired from?"

"The point is, I can establish that it was."

"You'd be lying, of course."

"No, Betty, I wouldn't be."

"You—you think I killed him. You've thought so all along. Is that why you're doing all this?"

"We haven't got time for reasons. I've got Eilene and Owen to tackle yet."

She didn't seem to be listening. She stood up abruptly and said, "You—" and then decided to keep the idea to herself.

"No, Betty, I didn't kill him. Are you doing it my way?"

"How many years do you get for perjury?" she asked harshly.

"This isn't perjury. You'll be under arrest on suspicion of murder. Suspects have a right to say as little or as much as they think wise. If this case goes to the grand jury—and you're lucky enough to be just a witness—then tell the truth. I intend to. But until then you're going to make a statement that doesn't implicate anyone, just as the rest of us will."

"What do I say?"

"Anything you like—as long as it isn't about Eilene and Owen."

"I'll tell you something very funny. I'm not doing it because you've frightened me. I'm doing it because I've still got the silly, schoolgirl idea that you're a nice guy, that you've got some decent reason for all this."

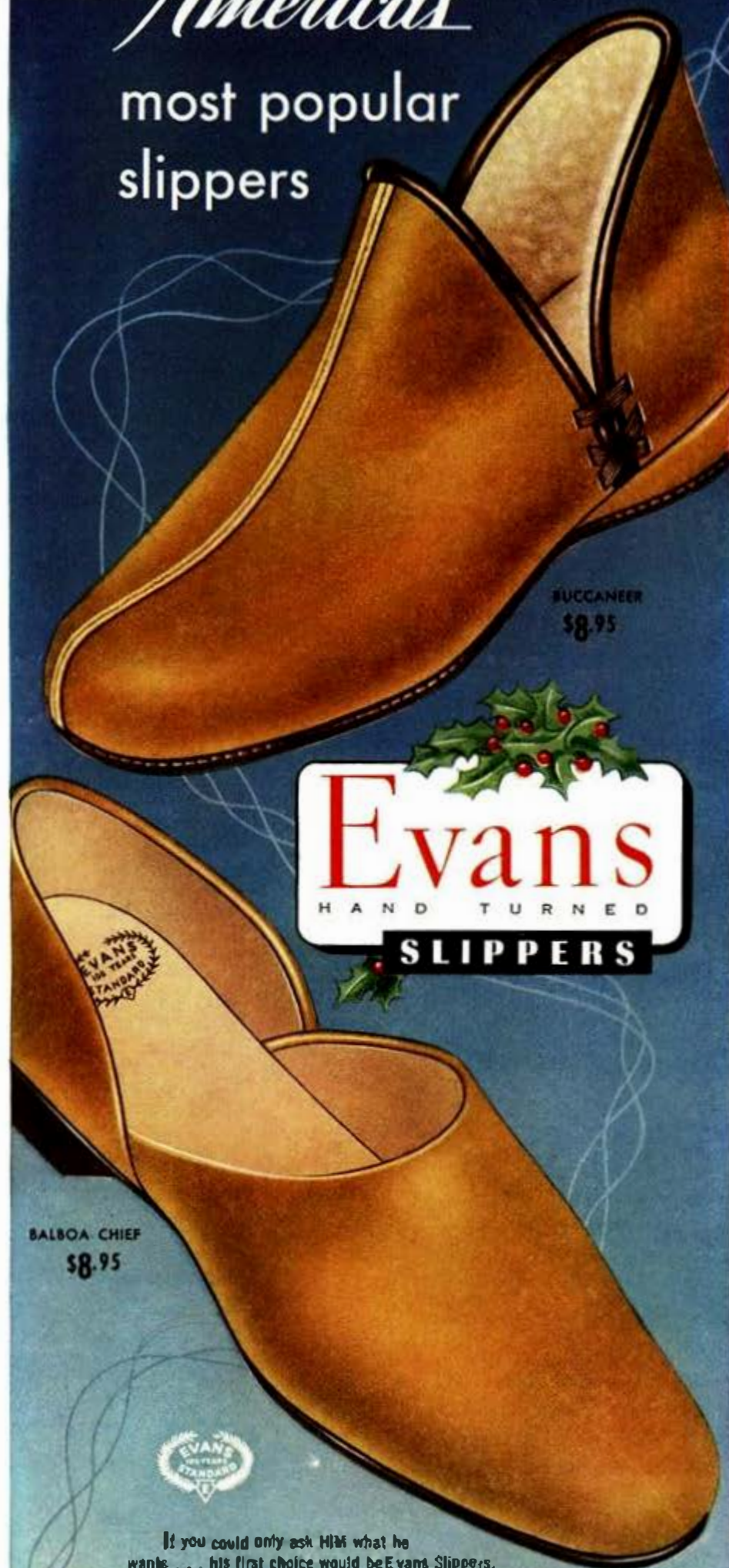
It took just ten minutes with Eilene to get her to see things my way, and with Owen it was less than five. I'm not sure if it was because he was tractable, or because the quarantine launch was coming up on our starboard bow.

The special-representative-in-charge was a blond, pink-faced

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## Death and the Skylark

Continued from page 164

man named Holman. He wore a pleasant smile, a wrinkled sweater-suit, and a one-inch haircut. He was painfully polite, and when he spoke he chose each word as if he'd just coined it himself.

His office was not in the regular government building, but on the second floor of an ordinary office building not far from the harbor. Otherwise it was typical of every civil servant's room from hero to Nome. One plain desk, some wooden chairs, a bookcase, mud-brown linoleum, and a secretary who didn't get her job through nature's bounty, but from her place on a list.

We sat in a half-circle in front of Holman's desk and waited for him to get past the polite inconsequentials and down to the business at hand. The *Skylark* had been impounded and its four passengers were presumably under arrest, although the ugly word had not yet been so much as whispered. A Kona wind was blowing, and when Holman finished telling us what it was and apologizing for it he cleared his throat and said, in a new tone, "The quarantine officer advised me that one of you, acting as captain, reported this . . . murder aboard. Where was the ship when the death occurred?"

Owen glanced briefly at me before he answered. "Eleven and a half days out of Wilmington. Last Sunday."

"Is the *Skylark* of American registry, Mr. Madden?"

"Yes. I told the quarantine officer all this."

"I know. Well, there's no question about jurisdiction, which means statements are in order. If you like, we can do it right here, together, or privately, if you prefer."

Nobody said anything.

"What will it be?"

Silence.

"Well, if there's no objection then, we'll do it now. You were acting as captain, Mr. Madden?"

Owen nodded.

"Then I'd like to begin with you, please."

I glanced at the secretary. Her freshly sharpened pencil was poised over the pad like a spear-fisher waiting for the kill. It shot down swiftly and began to move when Holman asked his first question:

"What was your relation to the deceased, Mr. Madden?"

The whole thing took less than forty minutes, everyone answering questions readily and at length, but pointing no fingers, dropping no innuendos along the way.

When it was over Holman sat staring out his window while his secretary went over her notes.

Holman asked of nobody in particular: "You say it was a fishing harness. He was strapped in?"

"That's right," I answered.

"And what side of the anchor

was the rifle on? Between the anchor and the fishing seat?"

Owen answered that one: "No, the other side of the anchor."

"Anchor lie flat on the deck?"

"Yes."

Holman went back to his window, his eyes as clouded as the sky the day the squall bit us. Finally he turned back, looked at the four of us with a kind of well-mannered skepticism, and said, "If I'd known it was going to be like this, I wouldn't have wasted our time. We'll have to take individual statements, of course. Maybe some of you will feel free then to say what's really on your minds. Frankly, I had supposed you all knew exactly what had happened, that it was an accident, or at most unpremeditated. I hope you all realize I'm forced to have a complaint filed in the District Court against all four of you—suspicion of murder—and to insist on prohibitive bail."

He picked up his phone, and two hours later I was making myself at home in one of the local houses of hospitality. I didn't know where the others had been taken, but each of us had gone his own way.

I was a government guest for just eight days, and I was visited by young Mr. Holman three times. Maybe I should say I was visited by young Mr. Holman twice and by old Mr. Holman once, because by the time that third visit rolled around he was an old and tired and harassed man, with blue circles under both eyes and a bad twitch in one of them.

It came on the eighth day, that third visit, and he walked in with his shoulders hunched and his mouth pulled into a thin, dyspeptic line. He threw his brief case onto my cot and fumbled out a cigarette. He said, "You're going to have to change your story. I'm afraid I never did believe it. A man just doesn't get friendly with a private detective he hires to tail his wife. But your story doesn't check out anyway."

"There's no way you could have checked my story and I know it."

"Is that so? Do you get paid to work, Bailey?"

"Not enough, but I get paid."

"We had Callister's bank account in Los Angeles gone over. No checks drawn to you, or to anyone else we could account for. Yet you're supposed to have worked for him for six weeks."

"Don't I detect a slight contradiction in your logic? You say a man doesn't get friendly, et cetera. Then you say he didn't hire me anyway. Which is it?"

Holman didn't answer that right off, but I could see that he was working on it.

"Look," I went on, "people don't pay for my kind of work with checks. They pay cash. Callister paid cash."

I said it simply, like a man

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## Death and the Skylark

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prieking a large balloon with a very small pin. And Holman's face showed me I had touched the business end of the balloon.

After a while he said, "So I can't persuade you to change your story."

"Sorry, I can't do it."

"What if I tell you I intend to charge you with murder and have the bunch of you before the grand jury?"

"I'd say you were making a big mistake."

He looked down at me, his left eye twitching a bit. He sat down and offered me a cigarette. I took it, lit it, and we sat some more in a kind of one-sided silence.

"You're right, of course," he said hoarsely. "The boys in the U.S. Attorney's office laughed in my face when I suggested we ask for an indictment against one of you. They wanted to know whose hat I was planning to pull the name out of."

"That's tough. Does this thing make a difference in your job—how you stand?"

"Why?"

"Call it curiosity."

"No effect whatever," he said emphatically. "I'm not a local politician, you know."

He went on mulling it over in gloomy silence, finally coming up with, "The girl inherits most of the dough, but everything indicates she didn't even know it. The wife comes into a good hunk of cash under the community property laws of California, but she'd have done as well if she'd just divorced the guy. You and Madden I can't figure any angle for at all, unless one of you had a yen for the wife. Any ideas on that?"

"After eight days in pokey? Naturally."

"To hell with you, too."

And, after a little more of the same, he stood up and said, "Well, that's that. You can go any time. The others will be released in an hour or two."

He walked over, opened the barred gate, and said, "You'll be looking for a room. I'd recommend the St. James, considering the short notice." He walked away, leaving the cell door open.

I sat there looking at it and not wanting to get up and go out. It was far more pleasant just sitting back watching the gate swing slowly against its hinges, savoring the idea that I could walk out of there any time I wanted.

That evening I checked in at the St. James, a strictly marginal hostelry with a baroque exterior and a Grand Rapids-modern décor. They had a room all right, 506, with bath and a view of the beach. And as I went up in the grille-work elevator, I wondered if 506 didn't also have a full complement of peepholes and nidget microphones.

It was a pleasant enough room, high-ceilinged, with busy wall-

paper and a balcony. I wondered if Holman had recommended the St. James to the others. I walked over and picked up the phone. "This is Bailey in 506. If any reporters come asking about me, I'm not registered. I flew back to California."

"Reporters. Yes, sir."

"Has a Betty Callister registered yet?"

"No, sir," he said, without having to give it a second thought. "Eileen Callister is in 304."

"Thanks. If Miss Callister registers, will you ask her to call me?"

"Yes, sir."

I hung up and wondered if there was any point in calling the Widow Callister. I decided there wasn't and went out to find something to eat. I found it in a restaurant that claimed to be "The Most Magnificent Chinese Food Place in the World." And it probably was, if you didn't get lost in one of the yawning caves or waterlogged rock gardens.

The desk clerk handed me a note along with my key when I got back. The note said Miss Betty Callister had asked for me at nine-thirty.

"Did she register here?"

"Yes, room 414, but . . ." He turned to glance at the key rack. "She's out right now, with Mrs. Callister."

"Did Owen Madden check in?"

He shook his head. He hadn't had to check his register for that one either.

I went upstairs and got under the shower, wondering if Owen had enough money on him to find a bed somewhere. I doubted it. The Skylark would be out of police hands by now, but I also doubted if Owen would sleep there.

I was still wondering about it when I went to bed.

I woke up feeling thirsty and hung-over and not in a mood for breakfast or for any of the other activities I had planned for the day. I got dressed and went out onto the balcony to wait for the phone to ring.

It came through for me at ten o'clock—Owen Madden calling from the lobby. I told him to come up.

His clothes were wrinkled and he was wearing a blue stubble of beard on his face and a look of hostile contempt around his mouth, as if there was something a little indecent about people who slept in beds.

"Mind if I take a shower and borrow your shave kit?"

"Go ahead. Where'd you sleep last night?"

"Under a Koa tree, and how did you sleep?"

He disappeared into the bathroom without waiting for an answer, and half an hour later he was out again looking cleaner but no happier.

"I don't suppose you'd like to

Continued on page 170

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## Death and the Skylark

Continued from page 169

tell me what this is all about, would you?" he asked. "You were sort of putting your neck out a long way for people you don't give a damn about. Why? Did you kill the Old Man?"

"No."

"Frankly, I didn't think you did."

"I thought you had that all figured out."

"I'm afraid I have. Well, so long, Bailor, it's been weird knowing you." He walked toward the door.

"Going anywhere in particular?"

"Over to the Big Island. I can get a job on a boat over—"

He broke off as a knock sounded faintly at the door. I called out a come in, the door opened, and Eilene started in with a kind of half-smile on her face. She stopped abruptly when she saw Owen, and the smile broke like a piece of china.

"I—I'll come back some—"

"I was just leaving," Owen said, and he shook my hand and walked out the door, striding past Eilene as if she hadn't been there, and closing the door firmly behind him.

"He's going over to Hawaii Island to get a job," I offered.

"How nice for him. I came up to thank you for— for everything. I'd have come sooner, but the reporters have been at me since dawn."

"Do they know I'm here?"

"No, they think you flew back."

There was a moment of awkward silence.

"Is there anything I can do?" she asked.

"Nothing, thanks. What are your plans?"

"I'm going home. I've got space on today's plane."

"Where's the Skylark?"

"Why?"

"I've got some stuff on it."

"Oh. It's at the Oahu Yacht Anchorage. Betty and I decided to put her up for sale."

"Why not?"

"Yes, why not. Well, goodbye. I'll never know why, but

you've been a good friend."

"Have I?"

"I think so. And I'll never forget it. Never."

I guided her gently toward the door and walked with her down the corridor to the elevator. While we waited for it to wheeze up to the fifth floor, I said, "Who do you think killed him, Eilene?"

"Does it matter?"

"Don't you think it does?"

"It was Owen, of course," she said quietly. "I wouldn't have cared if he'd had the honesty and manhood to face me with it." She looked at me wide-eyed. "I'd have married him, knowing he'd killed to . . . Well, what's the difference? It's as dead as poor Glen now. Deader."

The elevator got there, and Eilene shook my hand vaguely and stepped in. Her eyes stayed on mine until the cage dropped below the floor level. I walked down the stairs to Betty's room on the fourth floor. There were no reporters, but there was also no response to my knock. I went back up and tried her by phone. No answer, and the dock clerk had no idea where she might be.

So I went on down to the Oahu Yacht Anchorage and found the Skylark, which was a little like coming home.

It seemed infinitely quiet down in the lounge, and musty. And there also seemed something missing. As I stepped into the galley, it came to me: Owen's guitar. It wasn't lying there on the couch as it always had. I had left Callister's letter under the paper in the galley cupboard; now I took it out and dropped it into a pocket.

I opened Betty's door. Even the lace spread was gone. I went back to the master's cabin.

The gun was there, the government's identification tag still dangling from the trigger guard, the silencer gone. Possession of a silencer is against the law. I started opening drawers. Callister's clothes were still there, and his

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"Sure—don't you get it? The inspector knew Gloria was having an affair with Mr. Bedford, so when the pawn ticket was found in her purse . . ."



## Death and the Skylark

Continued from page 170

pipes. And in the bottom drawer I found what I was looking for: a ball of twine, the same one I had noticed vaguely the first day Owen had shown me through the boat.

I picked it up and held it to my nose. It didn't have quite the odor I'd expected, but what it had spelled the same thing. For the first time I was absolutely certain I was right, and my hands trembled as I dropped the string into a pocket, picked up the gun, tore off the tag, and took out a cartridge. I pried out the lead, dumped the powder down the drain in the two-by-two head, and put the gutted cartridge into the firing chamber.

Up on deck, I walked forward to where the anchor lay and knelt beside it, putting the barrel of the rifle across the anchor and lining it up carefully with the fishing seat. I stretched on the deck and sighted along it, moving the butt till it rested snugly against the side. That did it: a bullet out of that gun would pass a few inches above the high back of the seat.

My hands were beginning to sweat now. I brought out the ball of string and unwound about fifty or sixty feet, broke it off and put a tight loop twice around the anchor and once around the rifle stock. Keeping the string taut, I put a loop carefully around the trigger, then around the back of the trigger guard, bringing it toward me without slack and making my way, half-crouched, toward the stern.

I straightened slowly when I felt the seat touch the back of my legs. I turned the seat and sat down. The business end of the rifle loomed at me with deadly intent.

There was an extra three feet of string. I picked it up and laid it across my lap. Slowly, I fumbled a match out of a pocket, lit it, and held it against the loose end of the string. My left arm, keeping just the slightest tension on the long stretch of string, was beginning to get numb. If the string dropped down from the trigger guard, I'd have to go through all this again. I wondered if Callister had had any trouble. No, he'd doubtless rehearsed it to a fine art.

The first match went out, but with the second the string began to burn and I dropped the loose end of my knees onto the deck. It burned quickly, fuse-like, with a flameless orange glow. I looked at the gun some fifty feet away, I should have had my back turned and my free right hand gripping the pole. But the pole was gone, and I wanted to watch. There were only a few inches of string left to burn before it reached my left hand. Slowly, slowly, I pulled. And the gun fired. The trigger had been filed to take only the slightest pressure. I dropped the string and watched it as it burned, the ash disappearing to a

white dust in the quiet movement of the wind across the decks. The gun had held against the anchor, the barrel still pointed at my head.

So here was the final answer to all the questions but one: Had Callister hoped to hang Eileen and her lover? For no that question had long since been answered, and the answer had made it impossible for me to let the world in on the little secret Glen Callister had thought he was taking with him. The answer was No, because there was no other way to explain his insistence that only one had intended to kill him. The state would have had to prove which one, and he had known they would never be able to do it. But the love affair that had killed him would itself be a long time dead. He had known that, too.

I took his letter from my pocket and tore it to bits, dropping the pieces over the side. The string had burned nearly to the anchor now, and I walked forward and knelt beside it. The string burned around the rifle stock and the rifle turned and slipped to the deck. The string fell loosely beside it and went on burning, the faint white ash wafting away, rising, and vanishing.

And in a moment there was nothing there but a rifle, lying as though it had been thrown from . . . The thought was suddenly broken as a soft voice said, "Now we both know."

I swung around to see Betty Callister looking at me from the boarding ladder. Only her head and shoulders showed above the deck and she was gazing at me with a gravely speculative air.

"How long have you been there?" I asked.

"Long enough to know that Dad . . . killed himself."

She came up the rest of the way and stepped over beside me. She looked down at the gun and her eyes seemed to darken and a muscle pulled along her jaw.

"How long have you known?" she whispered.

"Almost from the first day."

"Then it's no surprise to you that Owen and Eileen have gone their separate ways."

"No, it isn't."

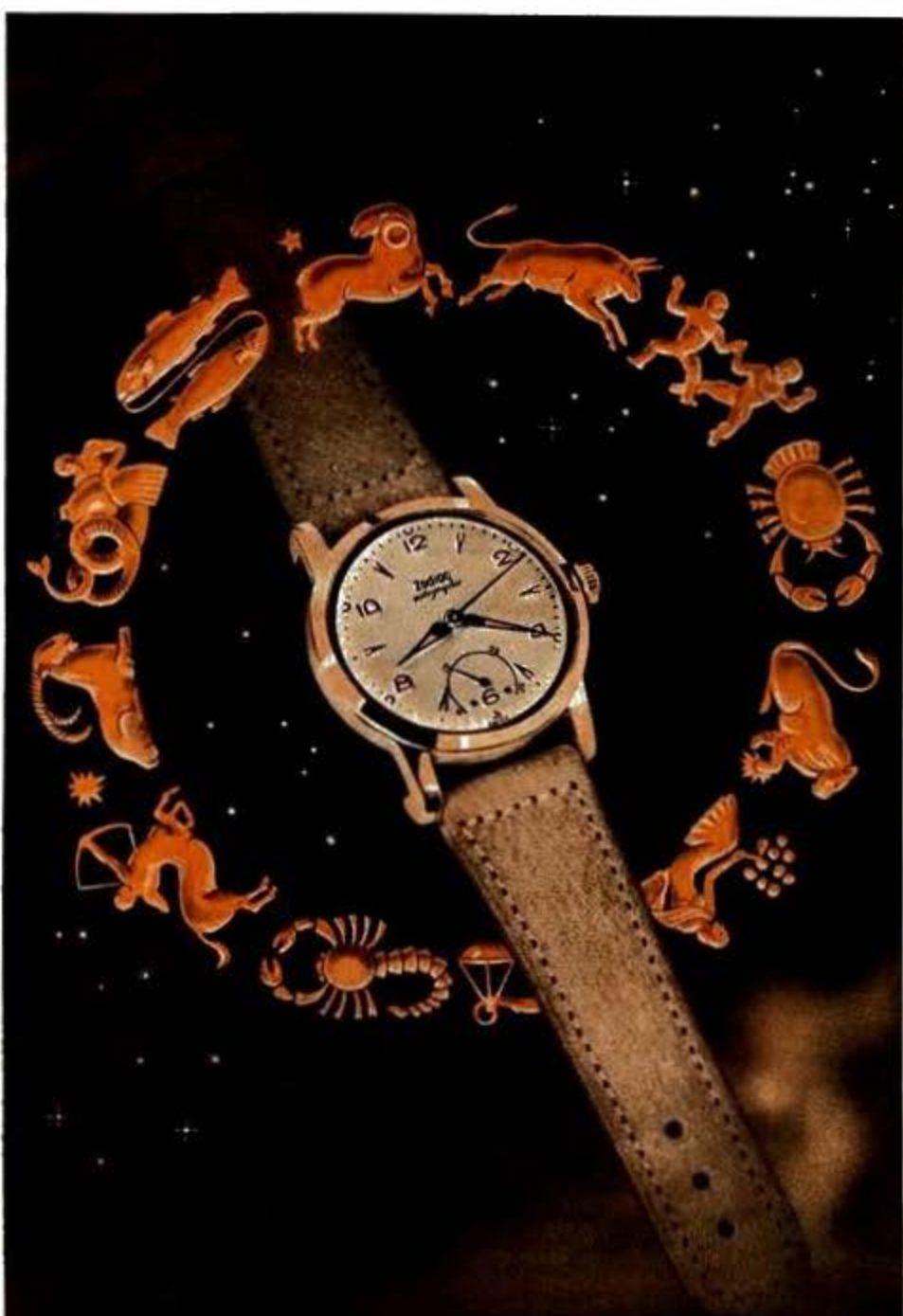
"Do you like playing God?"

"No," I said. "But I'd have liked something else even less: knowing your father had died in vain."

She looked up at me, holding my eyes steadily with hers for a long while. I felt that it was somehow important to hold, not to look away. And, quite suddenly, her eyes misted and filled, and she turned away and looked out toward the open sea.

After a moment I said, "I found quite a spot last night, in case you're hungry. The Most Magnificent Chinese Food Place in the World."

She turned back to me and slowly smiled. "Sounds wonderful," she said. "Let's go . . ." #



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