

PROBLEM IN MURDER

Gilroy spread the office copy of the *Morning Post* over the editor's desk and stared glumly at the black streamer. The editor was picking at his inky cuticles without looking at them; he was watching Gilroy's face.

"Twelfth ax victim found in Bronx," Gilroy grumbled. "Twelve in two weeks—and not a single clue."

The editor drew in his breath with a pained hiss and yanked out a handkerchief to dab at a bleeding finger. Gilroy raised his gaunt head, annoyed.

"Why don't you get a manicure, chief?" he pleaded. "That nail-picking of yours is getting me too used to blood."

The editor wrapped the handkerchief around his finger and said, "I'm taking you off the torso story, Gilroy. What's the difference who goes down to headquarters and gets the police handout? Admit it yourself—outside of the padding, your stories are the same as any of the other papers'. Why should I keep an expensive man on the job when a cub can do as well? There are other stories waiting for you to tackle them."

Gilroy sighed and sat down. He sighed again and stood up, going behind the editor's desk to the window that looked over the dark river to the lights in Jersey. His long, hewn face twisted thoughtfully at them.

"You're right, of course, chief. But, hell!" He turned around. "Do we *have* to get our handouts from the cops? How about us doing some detective work? Chief—will you leave that finger alone?"

The editor looked up hastily, although his thumb continued to caress the bleeding cuticle. "Our own detecting?" he repeated. "How? You—and no other reporter, either—ever got close enough to the victims to give an eyewitness description of what they looked like. The cops won't even let you take a peek. They find an arm or a leg, all wrapped up in brown grocery bags; but did you ever see them? All night long they've got radio cars riding up and down the Bronx, yet nearly every morning they find arms or legs."

"I know, but—"

"What can you do when the cops can't stop the murders?"

"Get a look at the chopped-off limbs," Gilroy said doggedly, coming around slowly to the front of the desk, his hands in his pockets, his head down, and his wide mouth pursed. "That's the main thing." He looked up angrily. "Why don't the cops let us take a fast look? There'd be more chance of identification. Not much more, maybe, but more."

The editor shrugged and went back to his cuticles. "You keep saying that. Do you have any concrete ideas?"

"Sure," Gilroy said slowly. "If we use our heads, we can see one of those limbs."

"How?" the editor asked, mildly skeptical.

"The bulldog edition's just hitting the stands. The final hasn't been put to bed yet. Suppose we insert a reward for finding one of the arms, legs, or whatever the next one will be, and bringing it here. Tell me *that* wouldn't get results."

"It might," the editor admitted. He rolled a sheet of paper into his typewriter. "How much should I make it for—two hundred and fifty? I can clear it with the board of directors ... especially if there are any results."

"*Two-fifty?*" Gilroy exclaimed. "Do you know you can get people killed in this town for a hundred? Make it about fifty—seventy-five tops. But they have to bring the thing here and let us take care of the cops."

The editor nodded and typed. "Seventy-five," he said, "and I have a good spot for it. I'm dropping the subhead on the ax yarn and this goes there in a box. How's that?"

"Great." Gilroy grinned and rubbed his bony hands together. "Now if the interns don't send us samples from the hospitals, we can grab off an exclusive. Anyhow, I'm going up to the Bronx and look around myself."

The editor leaped out of his chair and grabbed Gilroy's lapel. "The hell you are! I've kept my men out

of there so far, and they're staying out till the terror is over. How would you like to find yourself hacked to pieces, and all the cops can find is an arm or a leg? You're not going, Gilroy. That's final!"

"All right, chief," Gilroy said with a mournful expression. "You don't want me to go, I don't go."

"And I'm not kidding. I'm not yellow—you know that; but that's the one place we stay out of. The cops up there are scared witless. If the maniac doesn't get you, they will, with a couple of wild shots. Don't go. I mean it!"

Gilroy got off the subway at 174th Street, on the Grand Concourse, and walked south along the wide, bright highway. Traffic sped north, south and east, but none of it turned west into the terror district. He met no pedestrians. The police had been taken off their beats along the Concourse to patrol the dark side streets.

Riding up to the eastern boundary of the danger area, Gilroy had decided approximately where he would spend the night. Dismembered limbs had been found as far north as Tremont Avenue, as far south as 170th Street, west to just short of University Avenue, and east almost to the Concourse. The geographical center of the area, therefore, would be a few blocks west of the elevated station at 176th Street and Jerome Avenue, but Gilroy knew it was too well patrolled for the murderer to be found there.

He entered an apartment house on the Concourse, which at that point is about forty feet above the surrounding streets. He took the self-service elevator down five stories to the street level and walked boldly toward Jerome Avenue. His hands were out of his pockets, ready to snap over his head if a policeman challenged him. But if anyone in civilian clothes were to approach, his long, lean legs were tense to sprint an erratic course, to dodge knives or axes.

Several times he crouched in shallow doorways or behind boulders in vacant lots when he caught sight of policemen traveling in pairs. He realized how helpless they were against the crafty killer, and why, in spite of their tense vigil, murders had been committed at the rate of one a night, excepting Sundays, for the past two weeks. He, a reporter, not particularly adroit in skulking, found no difficulty in getting through the police cordon to Jerome Avenue and 176th Street!

He looked carefully before crossing under the elevated; when he saw that the road was completely deserted, he raced from post to post, across to a used-car lot. While he was still on the run, he chose a car slightly to the front of the first row, flung open the door, and crouched down on the floor. From that position, with his eyes just above the dashboard, he had a relatively clear view of the avenue for blocks each way. He made himself comfortable by resting against the panel. From time to time he cautiously smoked a cigarette, blowing the smoke through the hood ventilator. He was not impatient or in a hurry—the odds were that spending the night in the car would be fruitless; only by an off-chance might the murderer happen to pass. But even so, it was better than merely waiting for the official police bulletins, and there was always the hope that perhaps the maniac *would* slink by him.

Gilroy relaxed; his eyes did not. They automatically peered back and forth along the empty, shadowy avenue.

He wondered where the murderer got his victims. All through the terror area, only policemen were out at night, and then in pairs. House doors were locked. Stores were closed. People getting off late from work stayed at downtown hotels rather than go home through the dark with horror in lockstep behind them. After the first murders, taxi drivers could be bribed to enter the area; now they refused fantastic tips without regret. The elevator trains carried no passengers getting off here.

Even Gilroy, deadened to violence, could sense the cloyed atmosphere, the oppression of lurking horror in ambush. Through those streets, where terror hid and struck, paired policemen walked too quickly and nervously, afraid of somehow being separated—hundreds of patrolmen, every available man in the city—watchful as only deathly frightened men can be.

Yet in the morning, for all their watchfulness, another victim would be found somewhere within the borders of the danger area—only a limb or part of a limb; the rest of the body would never be found nor identified.

That was another point that puzzled Gilroy. Obviously the slayer had some superperfect method of disposing of the bodies. Then why did he casually leave a limb where it could be easily found after each murder? Bravado? It must have been, for those dismembered limbs could have been disposed of even

more easily than the rest of the bodies. If not for that apparent egomaniacal quirk, the crimes could have been committed indefinitely, without detection.

It was long after midnight. Gilroy fished a cigarette out of an open pack in his pocket. For only an instant, he bent under the dash to hide the match's flare. When he straightened up—

A man was walking north along the avenue! A man in a topcoat too big for him, a hat that shadowed his face, a small package in his left hand.

A small package!

He halted. Gilroy could have sworn that the halt was absent-minded. The man raised the package and looked at it as if he had just remembered it. Then he dropped it neatly in a box of rubbish. He walked on at no more than a stroll.

Gilroy clutched the door handle. Cursing, he stopped turning it before it opened; a white-roofed police car was slowly cruising by. Gilroy knew that the passenger cop rode with his gun resting alertly out the open window.

For a moment Gilroy calculated his chance of dashing across the avenue, scooping up the bundle and following the murderer before he escaped. There was no chance. It would be suicidal.

The elevated pillars hid his view of the corner toward which the killer had strolled. When he did not cross, Gilroy knew that he had turned up that street.

At that point the police car drew abreast, and Gilroy saw the men inside stare at every doorway, every shadow behind the posts, the dark lot he was hiding in—

And then they rode past without seeing him. When they reached the corner, Gilroy clutched the door handle, waiting for them to whip suddenly off the avenue and up that street. They didn't. The murderer must have vanished somehow.

Gilroy slid out of the car, crouched and scuttled to the nearest pillar, like a soldier running under fire. He stood there until he was certain that no one had seen him. Then he darted from post to post, to the one that stood opposite the rubbish box.

In the next instant, he had snatched up the bundle, on the run, and huddled against a wall, hugging the revoltingly shaped parcel under his arm. He edged swiftly along the building to the corner where the maniac had disappeared.

Nobody was there, of course. But he broke into a limber sprint, stuffing the bundle into his belt under the loose jacket, where it could not be seen. At the corner he slowed to an unsuspecting walk.

He picked a lucky moment to do it. Two policemen in the middle of the northwest block shouted for him to halt, came running with drawn guns—

He stopped and waited, his hands ostentatiously above his head. They reached him, covering him from both sides.

"Who the hell are you?" one demanded with angry panic. "Why are you out?"

"Gilroy, reporter on the *Morning Post*. You'll find my identification papers in my inside breast pocket. I'm unarmed."

Brutally, to cover his fear, the cop at his left tore the wallet out and held the papers to the street light. He blew out his breath without shame and handed the wallet to his partner.

"All right," the second growled, relieved but still shaking. "You can put them down, you lousy jerk. You know how close you came to getting plugged?"

"We got all we can do to keep from shooting each other when we pass another beat," the first patrolman said. "You stinking reporters don't have a heart."

Gilroy grinned. "Now, now, boys, it's only your nerves. All you have to worry about is a maniac. I need a story!"

"You'll get a story," the first cop said, viciously quiet. "We'll boot you onto the El and report your paper to the commissioner. That will give you something to cover."

"With both hands," said the other policeman.

They expected him to cringe before this threat. It would mean being denied the official police bulletins. But as they strode grimly toward the elevated station, Gilroy's forearm pressed reassuringly against the brown paper bundle inside the top of his pants. Official bulletins—huh!

At five after nine the next morning, Gilroy and the night editor were roused from their respective beds and ordered to see the police commissioner immediately. They met outside his office.

"What's up?" Gilroy asked cheerily.

"You should ask," the editor grumbled. "Your idea snapped back."

"Come on, you two," a police clerk said. "Get inside."

"Here it comes," the editor said resignedly, opening the door that led to Police Commissioner Major Green.

The major was a retired army officer, a short, wide, stiff man with a belligerent mustache. He sat upright and walked square and his voice was loud enough to make the wings of his mustache flutter—always in indignation. He ran the police department like a military post, and the jails like stockades, and he had an extremely vague idea of civil rights.

Major Green pushed back from his desk and stabbed them with a hostile glare. "You're from the *Morning Post*, eh?" he barked in clipped military tones. "I'm being easy with you. Your paper campaigned for my party. Take that reward offer out and put in a complete retraction. I won't press for suspension of publication."

The editor opened his mouth to speak. But Gilroy cut in sharply: "That sounds like censorship." He fished out a cigarette and lit it.

"Damn right it does," Major Green snapped. "That's just what it is, and the censorship is going to stay clamped on tight just as long as that maniac in the Bronx keeps our citizens terrified. And put out that cigarette before you get thrown out."

"We don't want to fight you, commish," Gilroy said, speaking with deadly deliberation around the cigarette that dangled uncharacteristically from the corner of his mouth. "If we have to, of course, we're in a much better position to fight than you are. Our newspapers'll take on only self-imposed censorship—when they think it's to the public's advantage."

Green's cold eyes bulged out of his stern face. Rage flushed every burly inch. Independently of his tense arms, his fingers clawed the desk.

"Why don't you shut up, Gilroy?" the editor hissed viciously.

"Gilroy, eh? That's the rat who sneaked inside the cordon—"

"Why should I shut up?" Gilroy broke in, ignoring the commissioner. "Ask him what he's done these last two weeks. Don't. I'll tell you.

"He's the only one in the police department who's allowed to make statements to the press. Reporters can't interview cops or captains; they can't even get inside the danger area at night—unless they try. He forces retractions on papers that step out of line.

"Well, what good has it done? He hasn't identified a single victim. He can't find the rest of the bodies. He doesn't know who the murderer is, or where he is, or what he looks like. And the murders're still going on, every night except Sunday!"

"Don't pay any attention to him, sir," the editor begged.

"I expect an arrest in twenty-four hours," Green said hoarsely.

"Sure." Gilroy's clear baritone drowned out his chief's frightened plea. "For the last two weeks you've been expecting arrests every twenty-four hours. How about giving us one? And I don't mean some poor vag picked up on suspicion.

"I'll give you a better proposition. You've been feeding us that line of goo because you don't have anything else to say. Most of the papers didn't even bother printing it after the first week.

"First of all, let us say anything we want to. We're not going to tip off the maniac. We do our own censoring, and we do it pretty well. Then, let us inside the danger zone with official recognition. We get inside anyhow, one way or another; but there's always the danger of being plugged by your hysterical cops. Finally, let us see the dismembered limbs and photograph them if we want to. Isn't that simple? And you'll get a lot further than you are so far."

Trembling, Major Green stood up, his craggy face shrunken into angles and creases of fury. He pushed his chair away blindly. It toppled and crashed, but he did not hear its clatter. He caught up the telephone. "I'm—" He strangled and paused to clear his clogged throat. "I'm handling this my own way. I

live up in the terror area with my wife and three kids. I'll tell you frankly—every night I'm afraid I'll go home and find one of them missing. I'm scared stiff! Not for myself. For them. You'd be, too, in my place.

"Here's my answer, damn you!" The telephone clicked and they heard a shrill metallic voice. "Get me Albany—the governor!"

Gilroy avoided the editor's worried eyes. He was too concerned with Major Green's reason for calling Albany.

"This is Major Green, sir, police commissioner of New York City. I respectfully urge you to declare martial law in the Bronx danger district. The situation is getting out of hand. With the mayor's permission, I request the national guard for patrol duty. The confirmatory telegram will be sent immediately. . . . Thank you, sir. I appreciate your sympathy—"

He clapped down the receiver and turned to them grimly. "Now see if you can squeeze past the militia sentries on every corner in the territory. There'll be a sundown curfew—everyone indoors for the rest of the night.

"Martial law—that's the only answer to a maniac! I should have had it declared long ago. Now we'll see how soon the murders'll stop!

"And," he stated menacingly, "I still want that retraction, or I'll get out an injunction. Fall out!"

In utter gloom, the editor went through the outer office.

"Pretty bad, chief," Gilroy said grudgingly. "We could slip past the police cordon. Napoleon couldn't patrol every street before, but the militia can put a sentry on every corner. It doesn't matter, anyhow, so I guess you'd better print a retraction."

The editor glared. "Really think so?" he asked with curt sarcasm.

Gilroy did not reply. In silence they walked out of the office.

"Well, let's not take it so hard," the editor said finally. "He was going to declare martial law anyhow. He was just looking for an excuse. It wasn't our fault. But, just the same, that nipplehead—"

"Lousy nipplehead is the term, chief," Gilroy amended.

When they reached the elevator, the switchboard operator called out: "You from the *Morning Post*? They want you down there right away."

They stepped into the elevator. The editor hunched himself into his topcoat collar. "The louse must have called up the board," he said hollowly. "Here's where we get hell from the other side."

Defeated, he hailed a taxi, though he was not in a hurry. Gilroy gave his Greenwich Village address. The editor looked up in surprise.

"Aren't you coming with me?" he asked anxiously.

"Sure, chief. I want to get something first."

At the apartment house, the editor waited in the taxi. Gilroy went upstairs. He took the brown grocery bag out of the refrigerator and made a telephone call.

"Willis, please." He held the wire until he was connected. "Hello. Gilroy speaking. Anything yet, Willis? . . . No? . . . O. K. I'll call later."

He went down with the package in his pocket. As they rode downtown to the newspaper building, Gilroy said, for the first time with concern on his face:

"If declaring martial law'd help, I wouldn't mind, even though it means giving that stiff-necked ape credit for brains. But this ax murderer'll only be scared off the streets; and when martial be lifted, he'll go right back to work again. Green won't get him that way. He's got to be outfoxed. And he's plenty sly."

The editor remained silent. From his set, dazed expression, Gilroy knew he was thinking of a terse note in his pay envelope. Gilroy did not have to worry about his job; he might have to take less than he was getting at the moment, but he could always manage to get on a paper. The editor, though, would have to start again as a legman, and that would completely demoralize him.

"Aw, don't let it get you down, chief," Gilroy said as they stepped out of the taxi at the *Morning Post* building. "If I have to, I'll take the whole rap. I'll say I forged your initials to the print order. Anyhow, they're only going to warn us. You know—`A newspaper can't afford to antagonize its sources of information. Make an immediate retraction and don't let it happen again.'"

The editor nodded, unconvinced. Under board orders, Major Green had been the *Morning Post's* pet appointee in the election campaign.

The day shift in the newsroom greeted them much too heartily. Gilroy recognized the ominous symptom. He had often discovered himself being overcordial to reporters about to be fired.

They entered the city editor's office. When he saw them, the city editor shook his head pityingly.

"You boys certainly started something. The board's sore as hell. They're holding a special meeting right now—"

The night editor stuffed his hands into his pockets and turned away.

"Sit down, boys. It might take some time before they cool off enough to be able to speak distinctly."

"Cut out the funeral march, boss," Gilroy said sharply. "You and the chief can soothe them. And even if Green cuts us off the official bulletin, we still can get along. Take a look at this!"

He had taken the parcel out of his pocket and put it on the desk. He ripped off the brown grocery bag.

"It's a foot!" the city editor cried.

"A *woman's* foot!" the night editor added, horrified, "Cut off at the ankle. *Ugh!*"

The city editor yanked the telephone toward him, Gilroy held down the receiver grimly. "I'm not calling the police," the editor explained. "I'm sending for a photog."

"Not yet," Gilroy stated flatly. "It's not as simple as that. Take a look at the foot first." He picked it up callously and showed them its sole. "See what I see? The skin is perfectly even—unthickened even at the pressure points. Not a corn or callus, toe joints straight—"

"So what?" the city editor demanded. "She could've worn made-to-order shoes. Maybe she was perfectly fitted all her life."

"Shoes aren't made that way," Gilroy retorted. "They've got to prevent the foot from spreading somewhat or else they won't stay on, so there are always points of contact that cause callus. Even if she'd walked barefoot on rugs all her life, there'd still be a tiny thickening."

The city editor pursed his mouth and stared. He had not imagined so much trouble from a simple ax murder. The night editor looked fascinatedly at the foot, picking blindly at his cuticles.

"Suppose she was a cripple or a paralytic," the city editor said.

"The muscles aren't atrophied. But for some reason or other, this foot never walked."

He removed the telephone from the city editor's unconscious grasp and called Willis again. When he had finished speaking, his face was grave. He picked up the foot again and pointed to an incision.

"I cut out a piece of muscle in the heel with a safety razor," he said, "and brought it to the chemist at Memorial Hospital. I made the incision because I knew she wasn't a paralytic. Muscles contain glycogen and glucose, the sugar derived from the glycogen. When you move a muscle, the energy to do it comes from burning the glucose, which turns to lactic acid. Even if she'd been a complete paralytic—hadn't moved in years—there'd still've been a minute quantity of lactic acid."

"What'd he find?" the night editor asked.

"Not a trace of lactic acid! Chief—get Green on the telephone and find out what time the national guard'll be at their posts." The night editor was accustomed to Gilroy's unexplained hunches. He quickly got an outside wire. "Major Green? . . . *Morning Post*. What time will the militia be in the Bronx? . . . Five o'clock? . . . Quick work. . . . Thanks."

"Wow!" Gilroy shouted. "Stay here, chief. I've got to find him before Green clamps down his martial law, or he'll be shot or arrested!"

In half the number of strides it would take a normal man in a normal, state of mind, he was at the elevator, ringing furiously.

The city editor could not keep up with Gilroy's mental pace. "What the hell was he talking about? Who'll be shot or arrested—the maniac?"

"I guess so," the night editor replied, unworried, absolutely confident in Gilroy. "Who else could he mean? I guess he's going up to the Bronx to find him."

But Gilroy did not go to the Bronx. His first stop was at the Forty-second Street Library. Rapidly, yet carefully, he flipped through the index files on every subject that might be a clue. He eliminated

hundreds of titles; even so he had to write out dozens of slips.

The man at the pneumatic tube was not astonished by the bundle of slips shoved viciously at him. "Another case, Mr. Gilroy?" he asked.

"Yeah," the tall reporter growled. "A pip."

In the south hall he appropriated an entire table on which he spread his books as quickly as they came up from the stacks. He scanned the contents pages, occasionally going through a chapter for more detailed information; wherever necessary, he looked through the indices of books that seemed to hold the key. A long sheet of foolscap swiftly became crowded with names.

He groaned at the clock. It was almost noon when he requested the city directory and a map of the Bronx. It was not very recent, but he was certain that the man he sought had lived in the same house for some time. With his ponderous equipment, he would have to, Gilroy reasoned.

He went through the enormous Bronx directory, eliminating every one of his references who did not live in the danger area. When he had finished, it was twenty to one, and there was not a single name left for him to investigate. He had eliminated all of them; not one lived in the district where terror reigned.

And he had only four hours and twenty minutes before that area would be under martial law—when it would be too late!

The two editors listened sympathetically, but they had no plan to offer. Gilroy scarcely heard them tell how they had soothed the board of directors. He was too frantically engaged in thinking.

How do you track down one man out of a city of nearly eight million? You don't know his name, what he looks like, where he came from, what he did before, who knew him. You only know that he lives in a mile-square territory, containing perhaps a hundred thousand people.

Gilroy did not have to ignore the city editor's persistent questioning. The night editor had quieted him to a glowering sulk by telling him that Gilroy would explain when there was no danger of being made a fool by a wild intuition.

"If we had block spies, like they have in Europe," Gilroy muttered, "we'd have had him long ago. But then he'd have been executed for doing something he didn't do. Well, three and a half hours to save the poor lug. How do I go about finding him?"

If he could interview every person in that mile-square district, he could easily find the man. Gilroy dismissed the idea. It was fantastic. But suddenly his eyes sparkled and he grinned at the night editor.

"Chief, I've got to make a canvass of the danger area. Will you back me? I've never let you down so far. Where do we get the dough to hire Peck, the ad distributors?"

The night editor writhed in his chair. He picked at his cuticles and his foot tapped nervously. "Special requisition," he said dully.

"Oh, no!" the city editor stated flatly. "I'm not writing it!"

"You don't have to. I'll do it."

Gilroy and the city editor realized the anguish that the night editor had gone through in making his resolution to back Gilroy. The business staff looked cockeyed at every expenditure, even routine ones; and this requisition, based on an unexplained hunch, they could not justify, even to themselves.

"O. K.," Gilroy said in a low, respectful voice. "I'll call Peck and ask for their rates." Reverently, in a manner befitting the night editor's gallant sacrifice—possibly of his job—Gilroy made a ritual of dialing. "Peck? . . . *Morning Post*. Can you interview everyone in the territory between the Grand Concourse and University Avenue, from 170th Street to Tremont Avenue in an hour and a half? . . . Good. How much will it cost? . . . Cheap enough. I'll be right down with a check and a questionnaire."

He waited until the night editor wrote out the requisition, watching sympathetically the whitened, trembling fingers as they scrawled out the numerals. At each figure Gilroy knew that those fingers were trying to rebel against their violation of conditioning.

Gilroy squirmed impatiently in the squad captain's car. It was too much for him to sit by and merely watch the men going in and out of buildings. All over the danger area Peck investigators were ringing doorbells and calming down the terrified inhabitants enough to open their doors.

"I can't sit here," Gilroy protested. He opened the door. "I'm going to cover a few streets myself."

The squad captain restrained him politely. "Please, Mr. Gilroy. The whole territory has been mapped

out. Each man's beat dovetails with the next one's. You'll only throw them off their stride."

Gilroy subsided, grumbling furiously. He knew that the men were working with maximum efficiency, yet he could not help feeling that his own efforts would speed them up, perhaps inspire them.

Each investigator had a hard-cover notebook in which to write the answers he received. The books were divided into sections—four-fifths for "ignorance," one-tenth for "no," and the other tenth for "yes."

Gilroy's facile imagination could picture the astonishment his men's questions could cause: "I don't know what you're talkin' about, mister." "Sorry. We don't want any." "*Hah?*"

For a short while he amused himself with various fancied interviews; then he went back to cursing the men's slowness. In spite of his pessimism, the job was finished in the specified hour and a half, and the crew met at the squad captain's car, parked in the center of the district.

Gilroy eagerly collected the filled notebooks. "Send them home now," he said to the squad captain. "But there's ten bucks in it for you if you drive me around to these addresses."

He had been amazed to find so many affirmative answers. With the captain's help he organized the addresses into route. As they rode to the first, Gilroy saw evidence of the terror that part of the Bronx lived in. Normally, children played noisily in the street, women sat on folding chairs on the sidewalks, delivery men made their rounds. But all was silent, deserted; frightened faces peered through drawn curtains.

At the first he rang cheerfully. A young man cautiously opened the door, which was held by a newly installed chain.

"An investigator was here a short while ago," Gilroy said, speaking through the narrow crack. "You answered his question affirmatively."

The youth suddenly brightened. "That's right. I've been interested in the problem ever since I began reading science fiction. I think—"

It was a matter of some minutes before Gilroy could escape and go to the next address. There he had less trouble escaping; but after several stops he lost his temper.

"These damned science-fiction fans!" he snarled at the startled squad captain. "The place swarms with them. They've got to explain everything they know about the subject and ask what you think and why you're going around getting opinions. I've got about a hundred and fifty addresses to investigate, all in less than an hour—and probably a hundred and forty-nine of them are science-fiction readers!"

At the seventeenth name he stopped abruptly. "This isn't getting me anywhere. Lay out the rest of these addresses in a spiral, starting from the middle of this territory."

The squad captain reorganized the route. They sped to the center of the danger area; and once again Gilroy began ringing doorbells, this time with a growing lack of cheerfulness as he eliminated one science-fiction fan after another. They were all scared to death of opening their doors; they made him wait until they did; and then he couldn't get away.

He came to a street of private houses. Immediately his enthusiasm returned. Inventors and experimenters are more likely to live in their own homes than in apartment houses. Landlords are not very hospitable to the idea of explosions, which, in their minds, are invariably connected with laboratory equipment. Then again, apartment houses hold room space at a premium, and scientists need elbow room.

He had only one address to investigate in this entire street of ultra-respectable, faintly smug one-family houses, each identical with the one next door, each nursing its few pitiful square yards of lawn.

But Gilroy felt exceedingly hopeful when he stopped at the proper house and looked up at the dingy curtains, unwashed windows, and the tiny lawn, absolutely untouched in all the years it had been there. Only a scientist, he felt, could be so utterly neglectful. Gilroy was so certain he had come to the end of the trail that, before he left the car, he paid the squad captain and waited until he drove off.

Almost jauntily, then, he rang the bell. When there was no answer, he rapped and waited. He rang a trifle more insistently.

Suddenly children, no longer whitefaced and terrified, came dashing happily out of houses for blocks around. Gilroy wheeled in alarm. They were screaming: "Sojers! A parade—*yay!*"

In panic, Gilroy glanced at his watch. It was a quarter to five, and from Jerome Avenue detachments

of militia marched along the street, pausing at street corners to post armed guards. When they fell into step and approached Gilroy, the street crossing had four bayoneted sentries.

Gilroy stopped his polite ringing and tapping. His left thumb jabbed at the bell and stayed there; his right fist battered away at the door. And the militia marched closer, more swiftly than Gilroy had ever suspected heavily armed men could walk. The officer stared directly at him.

Just then the door opened and a small, wrinkled, old face peered up at him. The watery eyes behind their thick glasses gazed into his with infinite patience and lack of suspicion.

"Professor Leeds?" Gilroy snapped out. The old man nodded, the webs around his weak eyes wrinkling expectantly, utterly trustful. Gilroy did not look back over his shoulder. He could hear that the guard was nearly abreast now. "May I come in?" he demanded abruptly.

His tall form blocked the soldiers from Professor Leeds' view. The old man said, "Of course," and held the door wide. Gilroy hastily barged into a small dark space between the outer and inner doors. Leeds was saying apologetically: "I'm sorry I was so late answering the door; my servant is ill and I had to come up from my laboratory in the cellar."

"An investigator was here today," Gilroy broke in. "He asked you a question. You answered in the affirmative."

For the first time the old man's eyes clouded, in bewilderment, not suspicion. "That's true. I wanted to discuss the problem with him, but he merely wrote something in a notebook and went away. I thought it was very odd. How do you suppose he knew?"

Without answering or waiting for an invitation, Gilroy strode through the hall to the front room, with the professor pattering behind.

Another old man, considerably more ancient than Leeds, sat at the window in a wheel chair. He turned at their approach. Gilroy suddenly felt uncomfortable under his keen, distrustful scrutiny.

But Leeds still asked, gently persistent: "How do you suppose he knew that I was experimenting with synthetic life?"

"Shut up, professor!" the old man in the wheel chair shrieked. "Don't you go blabbin' everythin' you know to no international spy like him. That's what he is, a-snoopin' and a-pryin' into your affairs!"

"Nonsense, Abner." Leeds faced Gilroy. "Don't pay any attention to him. You're not a spy, are you, Mr. . . . uh—"

"Gilroy. No. I came here—"

"He brought me up from a child. I know he doesn't like to hear this, but his mind isn't what it used to be. He's a nasty-minded old crank."

Abner drew in his creased lips with a hiss of pain. Then he rasped: "No spy, huh? Why's he bustin' in with them sojers on his heels?"

"That's the point, boys," Gilroy said. He shoved his battered hat off his angular brow and sat on a plush sofa that was red only in isolated spots. Most of the nap had come off on countless pants, dust had turned it to a hideous purple, and a number of its springs coiled uselessly into the air. "Sit down, please, professor."

Leeds sat in the depths of a huge chair and folded his hands. "You are trying to synthesize life, aren't you?"

The professor nodded eagerly. "And I almost have, Mr. Gilroy!"

Gilroy leaned forward with his elbows on his high knees. "Do you read newspapers, professor? ... I mean, lately?"

"I have so much to do," Leeds stammered, his lined, transparent skin flushing. "Abner neglected his diabetic diet—gangrene set in—and his leg had to be amputated. I have to do all the cleaning, cooking, shopping, buy my material and equipment, take care of him—"

"I know," Gilroy interrupted. "I figured you didn't read the—"

He stopped in amazement. The professor had creaked to his feet and rushed to Abner's side, where he stood patting the old servant on the shoulder. Tears were squeezing out of Abner's eyes.

"Ain't it bad enough I can't do nothin'," the old man wailed, "and I gotta let you take care of me? You're plumb mean, talkin' 'bout it!"

"I'm sorry, Abner. You know I don't mind taking care of you. It's only right that I should. Wouldn't you do it for me?"

Abner wiped his nose on his sleeve and grinned up brokenly. "That's so," he admitted. "Reckon I must be gittin' into my second childhood."

Leeds returned to his seat, confident that Abner was pacified, and looked expectantly at Gilroy. "You were saying—"

"I don't want to scare you, professor. I'm here to help you."

"Fine," Leeds smiled, with absolute trust.

"You watch that there slicker," Abner whispered hoarsely.

"You made several limbs and at least one foot, didn't you?" Gilroy asked. "You weren't satisfied with them, so you threw them away."

"Oh, they were no good at all, complete failures," Leeds confided.

"Let's leave that until later. No doubt you had good reasons for discarding the limbs. But you just threw them away in the street, and people found them. Now the people up here're afraid of being murdered and hacked to pieces. They think those limbs were chopped off corpses!"

"Really?" Leeds smiled tolerantly. "Isn't that silly? A few simple tests would prove that they never lived."

"I made a couple of those tests," Gilroy said. "That's how I found out that they were synthetic limbs. But you won't convince the cops and these people up here that they were. So now there's martial law in this part of the Bronx, with soldiers posted on every corner."

Leeds stood up; he shuffled back and forth, his hands twisting anxiously behind his back. "Oh, dear," he gasped. "My goodness! I had no idea I would cause so much trouble. You understand, don't you, Mr. Gilroy? I was experimenting with limbs, studying them, before I felt I was ready to construct an entire synthetic human being. The limbs were highly imperfect. I had to dispose of them somehow. So, when I went out for walks at night, I wrapped them up and threw them away. They seemed so imperfect to me. They scarcely looked human, I thought—"

Abner's mouth had dropped open in astonishment. He compressed it grimly and said: "You gotta clear yourself, professor. You're the first Leeds that anybody ever called a murderer! Go out and tell them!"

"Precisely." Leeds walked purposefully toward his topcoat, draped over a sagging grand piano. "Dear me—I had no idea! I know just how the people feel. They must think I'm just a common Jack the Ripper. Please help me with my coat, Mr. Gilroy. I'll go right down and explain to the authorities that it was all a terrible mistake; and I'll bring a synthetic limb with me as proof. That will clear everything up."

Abner bounced excitedly in his chair. "Atta boy, professor!"

"Wait a minute," Gilroy said sharply, before the situation could get out of hand. He snatched the coat and held it tightly under his arm. "You'll be stopped by the sentries. They'll search you. Most of them're green kids out on what they think is a dangerous job—getting a bloodthirsty maniac. If they find a synthetic limb on you, bullets're liable to start flying—plain nervousness, you know, but in the line of duty."

"Heavens!" Leeds cried. "They wouldn't actually *shoot* me!"

"They might. But suppose they let you through—"

"You'd come up against a police commissioner who hates to have anyone prove he's a fool. He's drawn hundreds of cops off their regular beats to patrol this section. Luckily he didn't catch you. So he had to have martial law declared. The papers've been giving him hell, demanding the maniac's arrest. He's jittery. His reputation's at stake.

"Then you come in telling him that the limbs were synthetic, that there weren't any murders. Why, he'd perjure himself and line up hundreds of witnesses to prove that you were the murderer. He'd take your own confession and twist it to prove that you were cutting people up to study them. Don't you see? ... He's got to solve these murders, but he's got to solve them the right way: with someone in the electric chair!"

Leeds dropped into a chair. His watery eyes clung to Gilroy's, frankly terrified. "What shall I do?" he

begged in scared bewilderment.

The reporter had to escape that pleading, frightened stare. He gazed down at the charred fireplace. "Damned if I know. Anything but explaining to Major Green. *Anything* but that!"

"He's right, perfessor," Abner chattered, fearful for his master's life. "I know them durned coppers. Don't care who they send to the chair, long's they got somebody to send there so's they get the credit."

At that point Leeds broke down. Babbling in horror, he shuffled swiftly out of the room. Gilroy leaped after him, along the hall and down to the cellar.

He heard sobbing in the basement laboratory. He clattered down the steps. He was surrounded by shelves of canned and bottled chemicals that clung to the raw cement walls and had been gathering dust for the good part of a century. A broad bench was constructed in two parts, one on each side of a twin, broad-bellied sink that had originally been meant for laundry. A furnace squatted stolidly in the midst of the apparatus.

Then he saw Leeds, half concealed by the furnace, crouching protectively over a deep zinc tank like a bathtub.

"When will they come to arrest me?" he moaned. "I'd hoped to finish my experiment—I'm so close to the solution!"

Gilroy was touched. "They're not coming to arrest you," he said gently. "So far the cops don't know who did it."

"They don't?" Leeds brightened. "But *you* found out."

"The cops never know anything. Only—" He hesitated, then blurted his single fear: "There's the chance that Major Green might become panicky that his maniac's slipping out of his fingers. He might have the militia search the houses!"

The old man trembled with redoubled fear. "If they did that—"

"This's what they'd find," Gilroy said, looking into the clear bath that filled the high, sharply square tank. In his career he had seen disgusting sights, but the human skeleton at the bottom of the chemical bath, with shreds of muscle, wisps of fatty nerves and an embryonic tracery of veins and arteries adhering to the almost exposed bones, made his hobnailed heart shrink. It took an effort to realize that the tattered remains were not remains but beginnings. The naked skull bore only the revolting fundamentals of what would eventually become features. "They'd think you were dissolving a body in acid!"

Leeds stared at the corpse in fascinated horror. "It *does* look like a dissolving body, doesn't it?" he quavered. "But it won't when it's complete—"

"When'll that be?" Gilroy demanded hopefully.

"In about twenty-four hours." The old man looked up at Gilroy's abstracted face. "Do you think that will be enough time?"

"God knows. I certainly don't."

The situation definitely held a concrete danger. Gilroy knew that high positions often twisted the morality of men who had them. Most men in Major Green's place would unscrupulously sacrifice a single life for the good will of eight million, and perhaps a national reputation. Major Green, in particular, had been conditioned to think very little of individuals. If the militia searched the house, Leeds was almost in the chair.

They climbed up to the front room. Abner still sat at the window; he seemed to be fascinated by the militiamen standing at ease on the four street corners within his vision.

"Huh—young whippersnappers!" he hissed at the boys standing guard. "If I had my leg back, I'd get past them fast enough, you betcha!"

Leeds' characteristic optimism had ebbed away, sapped by the knowledge of the chaos his lifework had caused. He sat huddled in a chair as far away from the window as the wall would permit, his terrified mind absolutely useless to Gilroy.

The tall reporter saw only one hope. He felt his analysis of Green had been correct, but—he did not have to convince the commissioner! He had only to convince the public. Green would be washed up as a public figure; on the other hand, Leeds would be saved from being railroaded to the electric chair, and the chief's expense account would be cleared by a scoop! For any single item, he would gladly sacrifice

Major Green.

He gripped the professor's thin arm in a hand like a tree root. "I'll get you out of this," he promised.

"Can you really?" Leeds asked breathlessly. "You don't know how I—"

"Don't step out of the house until I come back. In a couple of minutes it'll be curfew. Chances are I won't be back before morning—"

Leeds followed him to the door in a panic. "But please don't leave me, Mr. Gilroy! Please—"

"You'll be all right. Abner's here with you."

"Sure," Abner croaked from the front room. "You got nothin' to fret about with me here. But ain't it time for my mush and milk, perfessor?"

"I'll get it for you immediately," Leeds quavered; then Gilroy was out in the darkening street, wondering how he was going to get past the alert sentries, who had already turned to watch his long body glooming up uncertainly toward them.

On the other side of the Concourse, out of the martial-law district, Gilroy crowded himself into an inadequate telephone booth and dialed the office. Getting past the sentries had been ridiculously easy; he had only had to show them his Guild card and explain that he worked on the night shift, and they had let him pass.

The night editor answered, rather tiredly.

"Gilroy, chief. Listen carefully. I found the guy. That thing I showed you today wasn't real. It was synthetic. The others were, too. I've got to clear him. He's working on a whole one—you know what I mean. If it's found, he's cooked."

"What do you want me to do?"

Gilroy put his mouth against the transmitter and said in a low tone: "I can clear him and grab off a scoop. That'd fix up that special-requisition business for you. He's got an entire one that's about half done. Send me down a photog with plenty of film. We'll take pix of the thing developing, slap it on the front page, and Nappie can go fly a kite!"

"Nothing doing, Gilroy," the editor said decisively. "This'd fix my job more than the special req. The board has big plans for Nappie. They're making eyes at Albany; after that it's only a step to the White House. Nope. This'd knife him. It'd mean my job for sure."

"Wouldn't it be worth it?"

"Look, Gilroy—I'm taking enough of a chance as it is, backing you. I can't go sticking my chin out at the board any more than that. Just be a good boy and figure out some other way of saving your pal. You can do it. I'll back you all you want. But get a beat if you can."

"O. K., chief," Gilroy said fatalistically. "I'll go home and grab some sleep. Leave me a blank signed req. I'll dope something out."

Long before dawn, Gilroy's mind came awake. He did not open his eyes, for, through his shut lids, he could see that the sun had not yet risen. He lay quietly, thinking. His blanket, which, of course, was too short when spread the usual way, covered him in a diamond shape, one end caught tightly beneath his feet and the other high on his bony neck. His knees were drawn up, soles pressed against the baseboard. Ever since attaining full growth, he had been forced to sleep that way; but his adaptive nature did not rebel against conforming to beds that were too small, telephones in booths that reached his solar plexus unless he shoehorned himself down, or bus seats that scraped his sensitive knees.

In some way, he was thinking, he had to stop the reign of terror in the Bronx; prevent suspicion from being focused on Professor Leeds; and, at the same time, cover the night editor's expense account—which meant getting a beat that would not smash Major Green's reputation.

But, to keep the police commissioner's record clean, he needed a victim. Gilroy knew enough about public pressure to realize that a sacrifice was absolutely vital. Left to himself, Green would find himself one—anybody it could be pinned on. The public would be satisfied, and the strutting martinet would again be a hero.

Gilroy's duty was plain: he would have to find a victim for Green.

At that point Gilroy's eyes almost snapped open. By sheer will power he kept them shut, and contented himself with grinning into the dark. What a cinch! he exulted. He'd get a victim, and a good

one! All at one shot—end the terror, clear the professor, get a scoop and save the chief's job! Incidentally, he would also give Napoleon a lush boost, but that was only because it worked out that way.

Gilroy pulled his knees higher, kicking the blanket smooth without even thinking about it, and turned over to go back to sleep. There were a few trifling details, but they could be settled in the morning.

The city editor had scarcely glanced at the memos left on his desk when Gilroy strode in.

"Morning, boss," the reporter greeted cheerily. "Did the chief leave a requisition?"

"Yeah, a blank one, signed. Fill in the amount. I don't know—he must be going soft, leaving himself wide open like that."

Gilroy waved his hand confidently. "He's got nothing to worry about. Tonight we'll have an exclusive that'll burn up the other rags.

"But, first of all, do you know a good, reliable undertaker, and how much will he charge?"

"Oh, go to hell," the editor growled, puttering about among the papers on his desk. Then his mouth fell open. "An *undertaker*?"

Instead of answering, Gilroy had dialed a number. "Gilroy . . . How's he coming along? . . . No, not Abner; the other one. . . Good. . . Is there any way of speeding it up? . . . Well, even a few hours'll help. I'll be up as soon as I fix everything down here. . . Oh, you don't have to get panicky. Just stick in the house until I get there."

"Who was that?" the editor demanded. "And why the undertaker?"

"Never mind; I'll take care of it myself. I want your gun. I'll get a hammer and cold chisel off the super. Write a req for the gun—the paper'll take care of it. Let's see, anything else? Oh, yeah—"

Gravely, he took the gun from the astounded city editor. As he sat down at the typewriter and began tapping at the keys, he was completely aware of the city editor's stare. But he went on typing.

Within a few minutes he yanked the paper out of the machine and disappeared into the elevator. In the basement he borrowed the hammer and cold chisel from the apathetic superintendent. For nearly an hour he pounded, hidden away behind the vast heating system. When he put the gun into his back pocket, the serial numbers had been crudely chiseled off.

Then he took a taxi and made a tour of undertaking establishments. Curiously, he seemed less interested in prices, caskets and the luxuriousness of the hearses than he was in the condition of the owners' businesses and the character of the drivers.

He found the midtown funeral parlors too flourishing for his satisfaction. He drove to a Tenth Avenue frame-house establishment.

"Rotten," the owner grumbled in reply to Gilroy's question. "The city's taking over these here tenements. Nobody lives here, so how can they be kicking off? I'll have to get out soon, myself."

Gilroy approved of the driver, who had evidently seen plenty of shady funerals. He offered the owner a flat sum for a full day's rental of the hearse and chauffeur. He was extremely pleased to see the gloating light in the owner's sad eyes. There would be no questions asked and no answers given here, he thought shrewdly.

Finally he called the city editor and told him bluntly to have two photographers waiting for his call, ready to meet him anywhere in the city. He slammed down the receiver before the editor began cursing.

It was merely another experience in a reporter's life to be driving uptown in a hearse. At 125th Street he suddenly remembered something very important. He had the driver stop, walked two blocks toward the Third Avenue El. When he returned twenty minutes later, he carried a bundle, which he threw into the long wicker basket inside the hearse.

He had not anticipated any difficulty in passing the militia-men. He knew that mailmen, street cleaners, telegraph boys, doctors, and hearses would be able to move around freely within the martial-law area.

They rode, unchallenged, directly to Professor Leeds' door.

There he and the driver slid the basket out and carried it into the house. The sentries were scarcely aware of their actions.

"I'm so happy to see you again, Mr. Gilroy!" the professor cried. Then he gaped at the basket. "What

is your plan?" he asked anxiously.

From the front room came Abner's querulous voice: "They ain't here for me, are they, perfessor?"

"No, Abner," Gilroy called out assuringly. "Stay here, driver."

He led the professor down to the basement laboratory.

Gilroy nodded in a satisfied way at the body in the tank. "Another two hours and it will be finished," Leeds said.

The epidermis was almost completely formed. Only in isolated spots could the glaring red muscle be seen where the skin had not quite joined. Its fingers and toes had no nails; and, excepting the lack of hair, eyebrows and lashes, its features were distinctly human and complete.

"I'm just waiting for the hair to grow. That's the final stage. The skin will be whole in a few minutes. Then the nails—" Gilroy heard wheels rumbling over the ceiling. The cellar door flung open and Abner shouted down, in terror: "Perfessor! Hey—they durn sojers're goin' through all the houses on this here street!"

Gilroy leaped up the stairs and dashed through the hall to the front windows. At each end of the block he saw eight soldiers; four stood in the gutter, facing opposite sides of the street with leveled guns. The other four paired off and entered houses with fixed bayonets.

"They can't do that 'thout a warrant," Abner protested.

"Can't they?" Gilroy snorted. "They can, and they're doing it. Sit here by the window, Abner, and warn us when they're getting close. They still have half a block to go before they reach us. Come on, prof—"

He removed the bundle from the long wicker basket and raced down to the cellar. While he ripped off the paper, he ordered the professor to take the body out of the chemical bath and dry it.

Leeds cried out: "He isn't complete yet!" But he removed the body, in spite of his complaints, dragged it to the floor and dried it. "It isn't alive!" he suddenly wailed, his hand shaking against its chest. "It should be—it's perfect!"

Gilroy shook out an entire outfit of clothing, a pair of old shoes and a filthy hat that closely resembled his own. "If he isn't alive, all the better," he said. "Anyhow, I always thought it was too much to expect him to live. Take fish, for instance. Put them in the same kind of water they always lived in—temperature just right, plenty of oxygen, plenty of food—and what do they do? They die. You make a body that's identical to a living one, all the necessary organs, all the chemical ingredients for life—and it just doesn't live. Otherwise it's perfect.

"Here, lift up his legs so I can slip these pants on him.

"You're on the wrong track, prof, when it comes to making synthetic human beings. You can give them everything but the life force. But there is one thing you can do. You can grow limbs on people who don't have 'em. Give Abner a leg. His life force can vitalize the synthetic leg."

They pulled a shirt on the body and tucked it inside the trousers. Gilroy spent a mad few minutes trying to knot a tie in reverse, until he knelt and tied it from behind. While he forced its arms into a vest and jacket, Leeds squeezed its flabby, yielding feet into shoes.

Then Abner croaked: "They're only two houses away, perfessor!"

Leeds grew too jittery to tie the laces. Gilroy did it, crammed the battered hat into the body's coat pocket, and roared for the hearse driver to bring down the basket. It was the work of a moment to load the corpse into it and strap on the cover. Almost at a run, he and the driver carried it up the cellar stairs to the front door. They dropped it while Gilroy made a hurried telephone call:

"Boss? Gilroy. Send the two photogs to 138th and Triboro Bridge. Right before the entrance. I'll pick them up in a hearse. Be there with the chief if you can get him to wake up."

He paused a moment to pat Abner on the back encouragingly. He said: "You're all clear, prof. Look in the *Morning Post* tonight. Drain the tank. If they ask about it, say you used to bathe a dog in it. So long!"

They carried the wicker basket to the hearse at a slow, fitting pace, just as the militiamen were leaving the next house. At the same funereal rate of speed they cruised through the martial-law area, which was being thoroughly searched, until they came to the Grand Concourse.

"Open it up!" Gilroy rapped out suddenly.

They streaked through traffic, turned east. At the bridge they had to wait fifteen minutes before the photographers arrived in taxis.

Gilroy dismissed the cabs, paid off his hearse driver, and ordered the photographers to help him with the basket. A scant three minutes later another taxi drew up at the hearse and the city and night editors scrambled out excitedly. They sent their cabs away.

"What the hell is this?" the city editor demanded. "Robbing graves?"

"Just give us a hand and keep quiet," Gilroy said calmly.

They carted the heavy basket to a deserted dumping ground behind two vacant furniture warehouses that had been condemned by the city for the new bridge approach. He removed the basket cover and ordered the photographers to help him take the body out and hold it erect.

"Now watch this," he grinned.

While the editors and photographers watched in horrified amazement, Gilroy backed off ten feet and fired the gun at the corpse's heart. He quietly wiped his fingerprints off the butt, removed the body from the photographers' inert hands, and laid it gently on its back, crooking its right hand around the gun. He placed the cap on the ground beside the naked, hairless head. Then he crumpled a sheet of paper in his hand and just as deliberately smoothed it.

"Snap the body from a few angles. Wind up with a shot of this note."

The two editors snatched at the note in a single wild grab. They read it swiftly.

"Holy smoke!" the night editor shouted. "I am the torso murderer. I realize that I have been insane for some time, and, during my lapse from sanity, I kidnaped and hacked to death a number of people. But the cordon of soldiers hounded me from one place to another, until I am finally driven to suicide in order to prevent my being captured. My name I shall take to the grave with me, that my former friends be spared the horror of knowing that once they loved this murderous maniac. God save my soul!"

The four men grinned admiringly at Gilroy. But the towering reporter dismissed their admiration with a modest wave of his astoundingly long, incredibly bony arm.

"The only thing I regret is that this's a gorgeous build-up for Major Green—the lousy nipplehead!" he said mournfully. "The autopsy'll show a thousand proofs that this thing never lived, but a fat lot Nappie'll care. And to think that I'll probably be the cause of making him governor!"

He insisted on holding the creased suicide note for the photographers to aim at, claiming that it required a certain artistic touch.

JOURNAL NOTES: Problem in Murder

THEME: Let's turn the *corpus delicti* situation upside down—suppose there's a mutilated corpse without a murder?

POSSIBILITIES: There are many fantastic ways to get an unmurdered mutilated corpse, but all demand identification with him and end with the death and not a tense mystery. The idea is to *start* with the corpse and work *up* to the discovery that there has been no murder. In science fiction, this means that the corpse was never alive and so couldn't have been killed.

DEVELOPMENT: Impossible to have a scientist protagonist; reader would have to be told the setup almost immediately. A detective *might* figure it out, but for him to sell the answer to his superiors would take a stupefying amount of gab. Ordinary citizen wouldn't be believable; he'd have to have a damned convincing reason to stick his nose where it might get sliced off by a murderer or bashed in by a police club. Finding slayer of somebody close might do it, but not if the corpse had never been alive. A reporter with a flair for detection? He has the Big Picture, an incentive for plugging away at the case, the facilities to do so *and* irritating (and therefore suspense-building) handicaps. No, not a whole corpse; would inevitably be autopsied and the answer found bafflingly but quickly. "Torso" murders so loved by tabloids—an arm here, a leg

there, *then* one single corpse to be used for ironical twist in which protagonist knows and reader knows, but not the cops or general public, because the corpse has to be used to get the "killer" off the hook.

EDITORIAL COMMENT: The story was written in 1939 and what happened nearly a decade and a half later is downright funny. I was asked to submit several of my stories for radio adaptation. This one was selected and I read it over before doing the script. Not having read it in all these years, I was intensely unhappy with a number of things. The characters were mainly overdrawn. The action inclined toward shrillness and a dead run. I'd certainly have cut out the references toward science fiction because I feel that it strains the willing suspension of disbelief, like the fictional private eye who declares scornfully that he's not like those private eyes you read about in fiction. All the same, I found myself trying to guess the way the story would turn out—I'd forgotten everything but the theme! (With about 5,000,000 words published and broadcast in between the writing and the reading, that's understandable.) And damned if the payoff didn't surprise me! When a writer outfoxes himself, he's performed a Neatest Trick of the Week.