

ED MCBAIN

AN 87TH PRECINCT NOVEL

JIGSAW

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Ed McBain



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Published by Thomas & Mercer
P.O. Box 400818
Las Vegas, NV 89140

ISBN-13: 9781612181684
ISBN-10: 1612181686

This is for Helen and Gene Federico

The city in these pages is imaginary.

~~The people, the places are all fictitious.~~

Only the police routine is based on established
investigatory technique.

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Detective Arthur Brown did not like being called black.

This might have had something to do with his name, which was Brown. Or his color, which was also brown. Or it might have had something to do with the fact that when he was but a mere strip of boy coming along in this fair city, the word “black” was usually linked alliteratively with the word “bastard.” He was now thirty-four years old and somewhat old-fashioned, he supposed, but he still considered the word derogatory, no matter how many civil rights leaders endorsed it. Brown didn’t need to seek identity in his color or in his soul. He searched for it in himself as a man, and usually found it there with ease.

He was six feet four inches tall, and he weighed 220 pounds in his undershorts. He had the huge frame and powerful muscles of a heavyweight fighter, a square clean look emphasized by the way he wore his hair, clipped close, clinging to his skull like a soft black cap, a style he had favored even before it became fashionable to look “natural.” His eyes were brown, his nostrils were large, he had thick lips and thicker hands, and he wore a .38 Smith & Wesson in a shoulder holster under his jacket.

The two men lying on the floor at his feet were white. And dead.

One of them was wearing black shoes, blue socks, dark blue trousers, a pale blue shirt open at the throat, a tan poplin zippered jacket, a gold Star-of-David on a slender gold chain around his neck, and two bullet holes in his chest. The other one was dressed more elegantly—brown shoes, socks and trousers, white shirt, green tie, houndstooth-check sports jacket. The broken blade of a switch knife was barely visible in his throat, just below the Adam’s apple. A Luger was on the floor near his open right hand.

The apartment was a shambles.

It was not a great apartment to begin with; Brown had certainly seen better apartments, even in the ghetto where he had spent the first twenty-two years of his life. This one was on the third floor of a Culver Avenue tenement, two rooms and a bathroom, rear exposure, meaning that it faced on a backyard with clotheslines flapping Wednesday’s wash. It was now close to 10:00 P.M., four minutes after the building’s landlady had stopped the cop on the beat to say she had heard shots upstairs, six minutes after the patrolman had forced the door, found the stiff, and called the station house. Brown, who had been catching, took the squeal.

The Homicide cops had not yet arrived, which was just as well. Brown could never understand the department regulation that made it mandatory for Homicide to check in on every damn murder committed in this city, even though the case was invariably assigned to the precinct answering the call. He found most Homicide cops grisly and humorless. His wife, Caroline, was fond of telling him that he himself was not exactly a very comical fellow, but Brown assumed that was merely a case of the prophet going unappreciated in his native land. In fact, *he* thought he was hilarious at times. *A*

now, for example, when he turned to the police photographer and said, "I wonder who did the interior decorating here." The police photographer apparently shared Caroline Brown's opinion. Without cracking a smile, he did his little dance around the two corpses, snapping, twisting for another angle, snapping again, shifting now to this side of the dead men, now to the other, while Brown waited for his laugh.

"I said..." Brown said.

"I heard you, Artie," the photographer said, and clicked his camera again.

"This is certainly not the Taj Mahal," Brown said.

"Hardly anything is," the photographer answered.

"What are you so grumpy about?" Brown asked.

"Me? Grumpy? Who's grumpy?"

"Nobody," Brown said. He glanced at the corpses again, and then walked to the far side of the room, where two windows overlooked the backyard. One of the windows was wide open. Brown checked the latch on it, and saw immediately that it had been forced. Okay, he thought, that's how one of them got in. I wonder which one. And I also wonder *why*. What did he expect to steal in this dump?

Brown leaned over the windowsill. There was nothing but an empty milk carton, a crumpled wad of waxed paper, and a flowerpot on the fire escape outside. The flowerpot had a dead plant in it. Brown looked down into the yard below. A woman was dumping her garbage into one of the cans adjacent to the alley wall. She accidentally dropped the lid of the can, clearly and resoundingly saying "Oh, shit!" and stooped to retrieve it. Brown turned away from the window.

Monaghan and Monroe, the detectives from Homicide, were just coming through the doorway. They were dressed almost identically, both wearing blue serge confirmation suits, brown shoes, and gray fedoras. Monroe was wearing a maroon knit tie. Monaghan wore a yellow silk tie. Their shields were pinned to the breast pockets of their suit jackets. Monroe had recently begun growing a mustache, and the sparse collection of hairs over his lip seemed to embarrass him. He kept blowing his nose into his handkerchief, even though he didn't have a cold, as though trying to hide his unsightly brush behind the white cotton square. Monaghan seemed even more embarrassed by the mustache than Monroe did. It seemed to him that after fifteen years of working together with a man, the man should not suddenly start growing a mustache one morning without first consulting his partner. Monaghan hated Monroe's mustache. He considered it unaesthetic. It embarrassed him. It offended his eye. And because it offended his eye, he constantly stared at it. And the more often he stared at it, the more often Monroe took out his handkerchief and blew his nose, hiding the mustache.

"Well, well, what have we got here?" Monroe said, blowing his nose. "Hello, Brown."

"Hello, Brown," Monaghan said.

"Now this is what I call a thorough job," Monroe said, pocketing his handkerchief. "Whoever went through this place was an expert."

"A professional," Monaghan said.

"It almost looks like the *police* shook it down."

"Or the firemen," Monaghan said, and looked at his partner's mustache. Monroe took out his handkerchief again.

"Must have wanted something pretty bad," he said, and blew his nose.

"What could anybody want in *this* joint?" Monaghan asked. "You know what you find in a joint like this?"

"What?" Brown asked.

"Cockroaches," Monaghan said.

"Bedbugs," Monroe added.

"Cockroaches and bedbugs," Monaghan summarized.

Monroe put away his handkerchief.

~~“Look at this joint,” Monaghan said, and shook his head.~~

Brown looked at the joint. The bed had been stripped, the mattress slashed on both sides, cotton batting strewn all over the floor. The same thorough job had been done on the bed pillows and on the seat cushion, arms, and back of the single easy chair in the room. Fade-marks on the walls showed where several framed prints had been hanging, but the pictures had been yanked down, their backs probably examined, and then thrown carelessly onto the floor. The contents of all the dresser drawers were similarly tossed all over the room, and the drawers themselves had been pulled out of the dresser and then flung aside. The one floor lamp in the room, overturned, had had its shade removed and discarded. Through the bathroom doorway, Brown could see the open medicine cabinet, its contents thrown into the sink. The top of the toilet tank had been taken off. Even the toilet paper had been removed from its roller. In the kitchen, the refrigerator door was open, and food had been hurled haphazardly onto the floor. The one drawer in the kitchen table had been emptied onto the white enamel tabletop, utensils scattered everywhere. As Monroe had wisely commented, someone must have wanted something pretty bad.

“You know who the stiff is?” Monaghan asked Brown.

“Not yet.”

“You figure it for an interrupted burglary?”

“Right.”

“How’d he get in?”

“Through the fire escape window. Tool marks on the frame.”

“Other guy came home unexpectedly, and *bingo!*”

“Think he got what he came after?”

“Haven’t checked him out,” Brown said.

“What’re you waiting for?”

“Lou’s still taking pictures. And the ME isn’t here yet.”

“Who reported the crime?” Monroe asked.

“The landlady. She heard shots, stopped Kiely on the beat.”

“Get her up here,” Monaghan said.

“Right,” Brown answered. He went to the door, told the patrolman there to go get the landlady and then saw Marshall Davies hurrying down the hallway toward the apartment.

“I’m sorry I’m late, Artie,” he said. “I had a goddamn flat.”

“There was a call for you,” Brown said.

“Who from?”

“Lieutenant Grossman.”

“What’d he want?”

“Said you should go right back to the lab.”

“The lab? What for? Who’s going to handle *this* if I go back to the lab?”

“Don’t know,” Brown said.

“You know what he’s probably got waiting for me downtown? Some nice little surprise, that’s what. Some nice hit-and-run victim. Some guy who got run over by a trailer truck. I’ll be down there picking headlight splinters out of his ass all night. Boy oh boy, what a day.”

“It’s hardly started,” Brown said.

“It started for me at seven o’clock this morning,” Davies said. He sighed heavily. “Okay, I’m heading back. If he should call again, tell him I’m on my way. I don’t know who’s going to handle this for you, Artie. The ME been here yet?”

“No, not yet.”

“Situation normal,” Davies said, and walked out.

~~The patrolman came upstairs with the landlady not five minutes later. By that time, the Assistant Medical Examiner had arrived and was checking out the corpses. Brown and the two Homicide detectives took the landlady into the kitchen, where they could talk to her without the fascinating distraction of two bodies lying on the floor. She was a woman in her late forties, not unattractive, with blond hair pulled into a bun at the back of her head. She had wide Irish eyes, as green as County Cor and she spoke with the faintest hint of a brogue. Her name was Mrs. Walter Byrnes.~~

“No kidding?” Monaghan said. “You any relation to the lieutenant?”

“What lieutenant?”

“Runs the Eight-Seven,” Monroe said.

“The 87th squad,” Monaghan said.

“He’s a cop,” Monroe said.

“I’m not related to any cops,” Mrs. Byrnes said.

“He’s a very good cop,” Monaghan said.

“I’m not related to him,” Mrs. Byrnes said, firmly.

“You want to tell us what happened, Mrs. Byrnes?” Monroe said.

“I heard shots. I went right outside and yelled for the police.”

“Did you come up here?”

“Nope.”

“Why not?”

“Would *you*?”

“Mrs. Byrnes,” Brown said, “when you came in just now, did you happen to notice the bodies in the other room?”

“I’d have to be deaf, dumb, and blind not to, wouldn’t I?” she said.

“Do you know either of those two men?”

“One of them, yes.”

“Which one?”

“The one wearing the sports jacket,” she said. Unflinchingly, she added, “The one with the knife blade sticking out of his throat.”

“And who is he, Mrs. Byrnes?”

“His name is Donald Renninger. He’s been living here in the building for more than two years.”

“And the other man? The one wearing the Jewish star?”

“Never saw him before in my life.”

“He’s the one who broke in, I guess,” Monroe said.

“We’ve had a *lot* of burglaries around here,” Mrs. Byrnes said, and looked at the detective reproachfully.

“Well, we try to do our best,” Monaghan said dryly.

“Sure you do,” Mrs. Byrnes said, even more dryly.

“Any idea what Mr. Renninger did for a living?” Brown asked.

“He worked at a filling station.”

“Would you know where?”

“In Riverhead someplace. I don’t know exactly where.”

“Is he married?”

“No.”

“He was a bachelor, right?” Monroe asked.

“If he wasn’t married, why yes, I guess he was a bachelor,” Mrs. Byrnes said sarcastically, and then looked at Monroe’s mustache.

Monroe took out his handkerchief. Apologetically, he blew his nose and said, "He *could* have been divorced."

"That's true," Monaghan said.

Monroe smiled at him, and put away his handkerchief.

"But you never saw the other man?" Brown said.

"Never."

"Not here in the building..."

"No."

"...or in the neighborhood either?"

"No place," she said.

"Thank you, Mrs. Byrnes."

The landlady went to the door. She turned before she went out, and said, "What's his first name?"

"Whose?"

"The lieutenant's?"

"Peter."

"We don't have a Peter Byrnes in our family," she said, and went out, satisfied.

The ME was finished with the bodies. As he passed the detectives, he said, "We'll give you written reports soon as the autopsies are made. You want some guesses for now?"

"Sure," Brown said.

"Looks like the first bullet hit the guy in the poplin jacket a little low, probably got deflected off a rib. Anyway, it didn't stop him right away. Left fist is clenched, he probably threw a punch and still had time to stick his knife in the other guy's throat, probably just as the gun went off a second time. *That* shot went clear through the heart, I'd guess. The guy in the poplin jacket started to drop, and the knife blade broke off as he fell. The other guy went down, too, probably died within minutes. Looks like me as if the knife caught his jugular, awful lot of blood in there. Okay?"

"Okay, thanks," Brown said.

"You handling this, Artie?"

"Looks like I'm stuck with it."

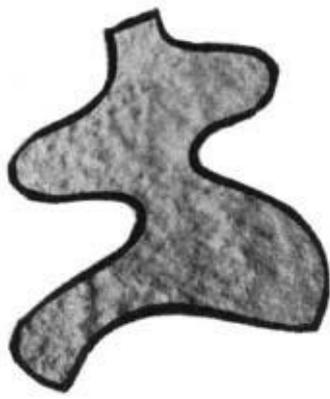
"Well, it's open and shut. I'll get the reports up to you tomorrow morning, that soon enough?"

"Nobody's going anyplace," Brown said.

"Toodle-oo," the ME said, and waggled his fingers and went out.

"So what'd the burglar *want* here?" Monaghan asked.

"Maybe *this*," Monroe said. He was crouched near the corpse in the poplin jacket. He pried open the dead man's clenched left hand to reveal what appeared to be a portion of a glossy photograph clutched into the palm. He lifted the photo scrap and handed it to Brown. "Take a look at it," he said.



“What is it?” Detective Steve Carella asked.

“Piece of a snapshot,” Brown said.

They were in a corner of the squadroom, Brown sitting behind his desk, Carella perched on one end of it. Early morning June sunshine streamed into the office. A mild breeze filtered through the wire grilles covering the open windows. Carella, sitting on the edge of the desk, sniffed of the late spring air, and wished he were sleeping in the park someplace. A tall, wiry man with wide shoulders and narrow hips, he gave the impression of being an athlete in training, even though the last time he engaged in any sportlike activity was the snorkeling he’d done in Puerto Rico on his last vacation. Unless one wished to count the various footraces he had run with criminals of every stripe and persuasion. Carella did not like to count those. A man could get winded just counting those. He brushed a strand of longish brown hair off his forehead now, squinted his brown eyes at the photograph scrap, and wondered if he needed glasses.

“What does it look like to you?” he asked.

“A dancing girl in a leotard,” Brown answered.

“Looks more like a bottle of Haig & Haig Pinch to me,” Carella said. “What do you suppose the furry stuff is?”

“What furry stuff?”

“This textured stuff, whatever-the-hell-it-is.”

“Mud, I would guess.”

“Or part of a wall. A stucco wall.” Carella shrugged, and dropped the scrap onto the desk. “You really think this is why...*what’s* his name?”

“According to the identification in his wallet, his name was Eugene Edward Ehrbach.”

“Ehrbach. Anything on him?”

“I’m running a check with the IB right now. On *both* of them.”

“You think Ehrbach really broke into the apartment to get *this*?” Carella asked, and tapped the photograph segment with a pencil.

“Well, why else would it be in his hand, Steve? I can’t see him going up there with a piece of a snapshot in his hand, can you?”

“I guess not.”

“Anyway, I’ll tell you the truth, I don’t see as it makes a hell of a lot of difference. The ME says it’s open and shut, and I’m inclined to agree with him. Ehrbach broke into the apartment, Renning suddenly came home and surprised him, and we get a neat double homicide.”

“And the photograph?”

“Well, let’s say Ehrbach was after it. So what? He could just as easily have been after

Renninger's wristwatch. Either way, they're both dead. The snapshot doesn't change the disposition of the case either way."

"No, it doesn't."

"Soon as we get those autopsy reports, I'm going to type this up as closed. You see any other way?"

"No, it looks pretty clear."

"ME promised them for this morning." Brown looked at his watch. "Well, it's still a little early."

"I wonder what kind of customers we're dealing with here," Carella said.

"How do you mean?"

"Two nice ordinary citizens, one of them carrying a Luger, and the other one carrying a switchblade knife with an eight-inch blade."

"Whatever Ehrbach was, he wasn't a nice ordinary citizen. He opened that window like a pro."

"And Renninger?"

"Landlady says he worked at a filling station."

"I wish the IB would get off its dead ass," Carella said.

"Why?"

"I'm curious."

"Let's say they *have* got records," Brown said. "It still wouldn't change anything, would it?"

"You sound anxious to close this out," Carella said.

"I got a caseload up to my eyeballs, but that's not why I want to close it. There's just no reason to keep it *open*," Brown said.

"Unless there was a third party in that apartment," Carella said.

"There's no indication of that, Steve."

"Or unless..."

"Unless what?"

"I don't know. But why would anyone risk a burglary rap just to get a piece of a snapshot?"

"Excuse me," a voice called from across the squadroom. Both detectives turned simultaneously toward the slatted wooden railing at the far end of the office. A tall hatless man in a gray nailhead suit stood just outside the gate. He was perhaps thirtyfive years old, with a thatch of black hair and a thick black handlebar mustache that would have caused serious pangs of envy in someone like Monroe. His eyebrows were thick and black as well, raised now in polite inquiry over startlingly blue eyes that glinted in the squadroom sunshine. His speech stamped him immediately as a native of the city, with not a little trace of Calm's Pointese in it. "The desk sergeant said I should come right up," he said. "I'm looking for Detective Brown."

"That's me," Brown said.

"Okay to come in?"

"Come ahead."

The man searched briefly for the latch on the inside of the gate, found it, and strode into the office. He was a big man with big hands, the left one clutched around the handle of a dispatch case. He held the case very tightly. Brown had the feeling it should have been chained to his wrist. Smiling pleasantly, he extended his right hand and said, "Irving Krutch. Nice to meet you." His teeth were dazzling, the smile framed by a pair of dimples, one on either side of his mouth. He had high cheekbones, and a straight unbroken nose, and he looked like the lead in an Italian Western. The only thing he needed to attain instant stardom on the silver screen, Brown thought, was a change of name. Irving Krutch did nothing for his image. Steve Stunning, Hal Handsome, Geoff Gorgeous, any of those might have suited him better.

"How do you do?" Brown said, and took his hand briefly. He did not bother introducing Carella.

cops rarely observed such formalities during business hours.

“Okay to sit down?” Krutch said.

“Please,” Brown said, and indicated a chair to the right of his desk. Krutch sat. Careful preserving the knife-crease in his trousers, he crossed his legs, and unleashed the dazzling smile again.

“So,” he said, “looks like you’ve got yourselves a little murder, huh?”

Neither of the cops answered him. They *always* had themselves a little murder, and they weren’t in the habit of discussing homicides, little or otherwise, with strange, handsome, mustached, well-dressed smiling civilians who barged into the squadroom.

“The two guys over on Culver Avenue,” Krutch said. “I read about them in the paper this morning.”

“What about them?” Brown asked.

“I guess I should tell you I’m an insurance investigator,” Krutch said. “Trans-America Insurance.”

“Mm-huh,” Brown said.

“Do you know the company?”

“The name sounds familiar.”

“I’ve been with them for twelve years now, started there when I got out of college.” He paused then added, “Princeton.” He waited for some response, saw that mention of his illustrious alma mater was not generating too much excitement, and then said, “I’ve worked with this squad before. Detective named Meyer Meyer. He still with you?”

“He’s still with us,” Brown said.

Carella, who had been silent until now, said, “What were you working on?”

“The National Savings and Loan Association holdup,” Krutch said. “Six years ago.”

“In what capacity?”

“I told you. I’m an insurance investigator. They’re one of our clients.” He smiled again. “Took u for a bundle on that one.”

The men were silent again.

“So?” Brown said at last.

“So,” Krutch said, “I read about your two corpses in the paper this morning, and I thought I better get up here right away.”

“Why?”

“Lend you a hand,” Krutch said, smiling. “Or maybe vice versa.”

“You know something about those killings?” Brown asked.

“Yep.”

“What do you know?”

“The newspaper said you found a piece of a photograph in Ehrbach’s hand,” Krutch said. His blue eyes shifted dramatically toward the photo scrap lying on Brown’s desk. “Is that it?”

“What about it?” Brown said.

“I’ve got another piece. And if you shake down Ehrbach’s pad, I’m pretty sure you’ll find a *third* piece.”

“Do you want to tell it, or do we have to pull teeth?”

“I’m ready to tell it.”

“Then tell it.”

“Sure. Will you help me?”

“To do what?”

“First, to get the piece in Ehrbach’s place.”

“Why do you want it?”

“Three pieces are better than one, no?”

“~~Look, Mr. Krutch,~~” Brown said, “if you’ve got something to say, say it. Otherwise, it’s been nice meeting you, and I hope you sell a lot of insurance policies.”

“I don’t sell insurance, I investigate claims.”

“Fine. I wish you lots of luck. Yes or no? Shit or get off the pot.”

Krutch smiled at Carella, as though sharing with him his aversion to such crude language. Carella ignored the smile. He was agreeing with Brown. He hated coy disclosures. The 87th Squad ran a nice little store up here on the second floor of the building, and so far the only thing Krutch was spending in it was time. *Their* time.

Sensing the impatience of the two detectives, Krutch said, “Let me fill you in.”

“Please do,” Brown said.

“Fade in,” Krutch said. “Six—”

“What?” Brown asked.

“That’s a movie expression. Fade in.”

“You involved with movies?” Brown asked, ready to confirm the suspicion he’d harbored from the moment Krutch walked in.

“No.”

“Then why the movie expression?”

“Everybody says ‘Fade in,’ ” Krutch explained.

“I don’t say ‘Fade in,’ ” Brown replied.

“Okay, so we *won’t* fade in,” Krutch said, and shrugged. “Six years ago, in this city, in broad daylight on a rainy afternoon in August, four men held up the Culver Avenue branch of NSLA and got away with seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars. That’s a lot of kale. The branch, incidentally, located in this precinct.”

“Go on,” Carella said.

“You remember the case now?” Krutch asked. “Meyer and O’Brien were working on it.”

“I remember it,” Carella said. “Go ahead.”

“Do *you* remember it, Detective Brown?”

“Yes,” Brown said.

“I don’t think I got your name,” Krutch said, turning to Carella.

“Carella.”

“Nice to meet you. Are you Italian?”

“Yes.”

“The leader of the gang was Italian. Fellow named Carmine Bonamico, record as long as your arm. In fact, he’d just got out of Castleview after serving a five-and-dime there. First thing he did while he was still on parole, was knock over the bank. You remember any of this?”

“I remember *all* of it,” Carella said.

“Are my facts correct so far?”

“They are.”

“My facts are *always* correct,” Krutch said, and smiled. Nobody smiled with him. “The wheelman was a young punk named Jerry Stein, a Jewish kid from Riverhead, his first job. The two guns were both ex-cons, Lou D’Amore from Majesta and Pete Ryan, also from Riverhead, a regular little United Nations they had on that job. They came in just before closing time, grabbed as much as they could from the vault, shot one of the tellers, and then drove off, presumably heading for Calm’s Point, which is where Bonamico lived with his wife. It was raining; did I mention it was raining?”

“You mentioned it.”

“They got onto the River Road, and had almost reached the Calm’s Point Bridge, when the c

went into a skid, hit another car, and caused a traffic tie-up. Two patrolmen from the Three-Six pulled up in a squad car, and Bonamico and his pals opened fire. All four of them were killed inside of five minutes. The great mystery is why they began shooting at all. The car was clean. It was later searched from top to bottom, but the bank loot wasn't in it. Not a dime of it." Krutch paused. "Okay, dissolve..."

Brown looked at him.

"Trans-American gets called in, Irving Krutch investigating." He grinned. "That's me. Result: Two years of intensive search for that money, and no trace of it. We finally settled the claim in full, seven hundred and fifty G's from our coffers to NSLA's." Krutch paused. "That's bad. I don't have to tell you how bad that is."

"How bad is it?" Brown asked.

"*Bad*. Bad for Trans-American, and especially bad for Irving Krutch who couldn't find the money. Irving Krutch was up for a promotion at the time. Instead, Irving Krutch is now handling minor claims, at the same salary he was getting six years ago. Krutch is an ambitious fellow. He doesn't like dead-end jobs."

"Why doesn't Krutch *change* his job?" Carella suggested.

"Because the field's a narrow one, and losing seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars is the kind of word that gets around very fast. Besides, Krutch has an inordinate amount of pride in his work."

"Do you always talk about yourself in the third person?" Carella asked. "Like your own biographer?"

"It helps me to be objective. It's hard to be objective about losing seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars for the company, especially when the case has been officially closed by your squad."

"Who told you that?" Carella said.

"You got the thieves, didn't you?"

"The case is still in our Open File."

"How come?"

"Let's say we *also* have an inordinate amount of pride in our work," Carella said. "The money wasn't in the car. Okay, the River Road is some three miles from the bank. Which means that somewhere along the escape route, the money could have changed hands. If that happened, then the rest of the gang is still at large, just itching to spend all that cash. We'd like to get them."

"Forget it."

"What do you mean?"

"The money wasn't turned over to *anybody*. If you're keeping the case open in hope of finding the rest of the gang, forget it. There were only four of them, and they're all dead."

"Do you know that for a fact?"

"Yes. I got it from Bonamico's sister-in-law." Krutch paused. "You mind if I tell it in order?"

"Any order you like," Brown said, "so long as you *tell* it."

"Okay, dissolve. Krutch is still bugged by the loss of that money. It keeps him awake nights. His company has settled the claim, not to mention his future, but it still bugs him. Where can the money be? Who's got it? Bonamico is no master criminal, mind you, but neither is he stupid enough to throw that kind of cash out the window of a getaway car. So where the hell is it? Krutch keeps wondering about it. Krutch keeps tossing and turning at night..."

"Krutch should be writing mystery stories," Carella said.

"...obsessed with the thought of locating that cash and becoming a contender again."

"A contender?"

"At Trans-American."

"Oh, I thought maybe you also did a little boxing on the side," Brown said.

“Matter of fact, I used to box in the Navy,” Krutch said. “Middleweight division.” He paused and eyed them both shrewdly, and said, “You guys don’t like me much, do you?”

“We’re civil servants,” Brown said, “soliciting information from a private citizen who may or may not possess knowledge of a crime. We are patiently waiting. If we have to wait much longer we’ll be forced to rent you office space.”

“I like your sense of humor,” Krutch said, and smiled.

“My wife doesn’t,” Brown said. “We’re still waiting, Mr. Krutch. We are getting old and gray waiting.”

“Okay. Two months ago, I got lucky.”

“You mean you were still working on this thing?”

“Not officially. Only on my own time. Pride, remember? Ambition. Tenacity. Krutch the would-be contender. I opened the paper one morning two months ago and learned that a woman named Alice Bonamico had died of cancer at the Sacred Heart Hospital in Calm’s Point. No one would have noticed her passing, of course, if she hadn’t incidentally been the widow of one Carmine Bonamico who had knocked over a bank six years earlier and caused the loot to magically disappear. I knew the lady because I’d talked to her often when I was investigating the claim. She was a nice type, quiet, pretty in a dark Sicilian way, you’d never think she’d been married to a cheap hood. Anyway, the newspaper item said that she was survived by a sister named Lucia Feroglio. I made a mental note, and later discovered she was a spinster, also living in Calm’s Point.”

“How much later was this?”

“A week or so. As soon as Alice Bonamico’s will was filed in Surrogate’s Court. It was a very interesting will. Aside from leaving her entire estate to her sister Lucia, it also left her, and I quote ‘Certain mementos, documents, photographs, and photographic segments considered to be of value by the deceased.’ I immediately got on my horse and went to visit Lucia Feroglio in Calm’s Point.”

“This was two months ago?”

“Right. The third day of April. A Friday. Lucia Feroglio is an old lady in her seventies, memory failing, barely speaking English, partially deaf. You ever try to talk to a deaf woman?”

Carella said nothing.

“Anyway, I talked to her. I convinced her that her brother-in-law had taken out a very small policy on his wife’s life, naming Lucia Feroglio as beneficiary, and that a check for one thousand dollars would be issued to her as soon as the conditions of the policy were met. I invented the conditions, of course.”

“What were they?”

“That she satisfy my company that she was indeed in possession of the ‘Certain mementos, documents, photographs, and photographic segments considered to be of value by the deceased.’ Even deaf old ladies who hardly speak English can understand a thousand dollars. She patiently went through all the crap her sister had left her—family pictures, birth certificates, even the caul Alice had been born with, carefully wrapped in a square of pink satin; that’s supposed to be good luck, you know, if you’re born with a caul. And in the midst of all this crap was exactly what I hoped would be there.”

“Which was?”

“A list of names. Or at least a partial list of names. And a piece of a photograph.” Krutch paused. “Would you like to see them?”

“Yes,” Carella said.

Krutch opened his dispatch case. Resting on top of a sheaf of Trans-American claim forms was a legal-sized white envelope. Krutch opened the envelope and took out a scrap of paper. He put it on the desktop, and both detectives looked at it.

Albert Weinberg
Donald Renninger
Eugene E. Ehrbach
Alice Bong
Geraldine
Dorothy
Rob

“Those names are in Carmine Bonamico’s handwriting,” Krutch said. “I’m quite familiar with it.”

“Seven of them,” Carella said.

“Or maybe more,” Krutch answered. “As you can see, the list is torn.”

“How’d it get torn?”

“I don’t know. That’s the way Lucia turned it over to me. It may have been accidentally damaged or another piece of it may be in someone else’s hands. Considering what Bonamico did with the photograph, that’s a likely possibility.”

“Let’s see the picture,” Carella said.

Krutch dipped into the envelope again. He took out a piece of a glossy photograph and put it on the desktop, alongside the scrap they had found clutched in Ehrbach’s hand.

“How do we know these are pieces of the same photograph?” Carella asked.

“They’re both cut like a jigsaw puzzle,” Krutch said. “That can’t be accidental. Nor can it be accidental that you found *your* piece in the hand of one of the men listed here in Bonamico’s handwriting. Or that the *other* dead man is *also* on the list.” Krutch paused. “Ehrbach’s a better burglar than I am. I’ve been in and out of Renninger’s place a dozen times in the past two months, and I never found a thing.”

“You’re admitting to breaking and entry, Mr. Krutch?”

“Shall I send for my lawyer?” Krutch asked, and grinned.

“Did you shake down Ehrbach’s place as well?”

“I did. And found nothing. *His* piece is probably as carefully hidden as Renninger’s was.”

Carella looked at the list again. “Who’s Albert Weinberg?”

“One of Stein’s close buddies. Jerry Stein, the kid who drove the getaway car. Beginning to make sense?”

“Not much.”

“Weinberg’s a hood in his own right. So are the other two, in case you don’t already know.”

“Which other two?”

“Renninger and Ehrbach. Renninger was busted eight years ago for pushing junk. He was a Caramoor at the time of the holdup, got out of prison only two years ago. Ehrbach was busted twice for burglary, one more time and they’d have thrown away the key. Makes the risk he took seem even more meaningful, doesn’t it? He was taking the chance of a third fall, and for what? Unless the picture means something, he was a goddamn fool to break into Renninger’s place.”

“You’re better than the IB,” Brown said. “Assuming this is straight goods.”

“As I told you,” Krutch said, smiling, “my facts are *always* correct.”

“What about the other names on this list?”

“I’ve been through the telephone book a hundred times. You know how many Geraldines there

are? Don't ask. As for Dorothy, she could be Dorothy *Anybody*. And the R-o-b? That could be Robert or Roberta, or Robin, or even Robespierre, who knows? It was easy to fill in the 'Renninger' because the name was almost complete. And I doped out the 'Ehrbach' because of the 'Eugene E.' They're both listed in the Isola directory. Alice is Alice Bonamico, of course. But I have no idea who the others are, and no idea whether there are more than seven. I hope not. *Seven* pieces of a puzzle are more than enough."

"And when you assemble this puzzle, Mr. Krutch, what then?"

"When I assemble this puzzle," Krutch said, "I will have the exact location of the seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars stolen from NSLA six years ago."

"How do you know that?"

"Lucia Feroglio told me. Oh, it took some time to get it out of her, believe me. As I told you, her memory is failing, and she's partially deaf, and her English is of the *Mama mia* variety. But she *finally* remembered that her sister had told her the photograph showed where the treasure was. That was the exact word she used. Treasure."

"She said that in English?" Carella asked. "She said 'treasure'?"

"No. She said *tesoro*. In Italian."

"Maybe she was only calling you 'darling,' " Carella said.

"I doubt it."

"You speak Italian, do you?"

"A girlfriend of mine told me what it meant. *Tesoro*. Treasure."

"So now there are two pieces," Brown said. "What do you want from us?"

"I want you to help me find the other *five* pieces. Or however many more there are." Krutch smiled. "I'm getting too well known, you see. Toward the end there, both Renninger and Ehrbach knew I was on to them. I wouldn't be surprised if Ehrbach *got* to Renninger merely by tailing *me*."

"You make it sound very complicated, Mr. Krutch."

"It is complicated. I'm sure that Weinberg knows I've been watching *him*, too. And frankly, I can't risk getting busted on a burglary rap. Which might happen if I keep breaking into places." Brown smiled again. The smile had lost none of its dazzle.

"So you want *us* to break into places for you, huh?"

"It's been done before."

"It's against the law, even for cops."

"*Lots* of things are against the law. There's seven hundred and fifty G's involved here. I'm sure the 87th wouldn't mind locating it. Be quite a feather in your cap, after all these years."

"Yes, it might be," Carella said.

"So do it," Krutch said simply.

"Do *what*?" Brown asked.

"First of all, go over Ehrbach's place with a fine comb. You can do that legally. He's the victim of a homicide, and you're conducting an investigation."

"Okay, let's say we shake down Ehrbach's place."

"Yes, and you find the third piece of that picture."

"Assuming we do, *then* what?"

"Then you go after Weinberg."

"How? What's our legal excuse *there*, Krutch?"

"You don't have one. You couldn't approach him as fuzz, anyway. He's been in trouble before. He's not likely to cooperate with The Law."

"What kind of trouble?"

"Assault. He beat a woman half to death with his fists. He's enormous, must weigh at least two

hundred and fifty pounds. He could break either one of you in half with just a dirty look, believe me
Krutch paused. "What do you say?"

"It might be worth our time," Carella said.

"We'll have to talk it over with the lieutenant."

"Yeah, you talk it over with him. I think *he* might understand how nice it would be to recover the
bank loot." Krutch smiled again. "Meanwhile, I'll leave the list and the picture with you."

"Won't you need them?"

"I've got copies," Krutch said.

"How come somebody so smart needs our help?" Carella asked.

"That smart I ain't," Krutch said. He took a card from his wallet and placed it on the desk.
"That's my home number," he said. "Don't try to reach me at Trans-American. Let me know what you
decide."

"We will indeed," Carella said.

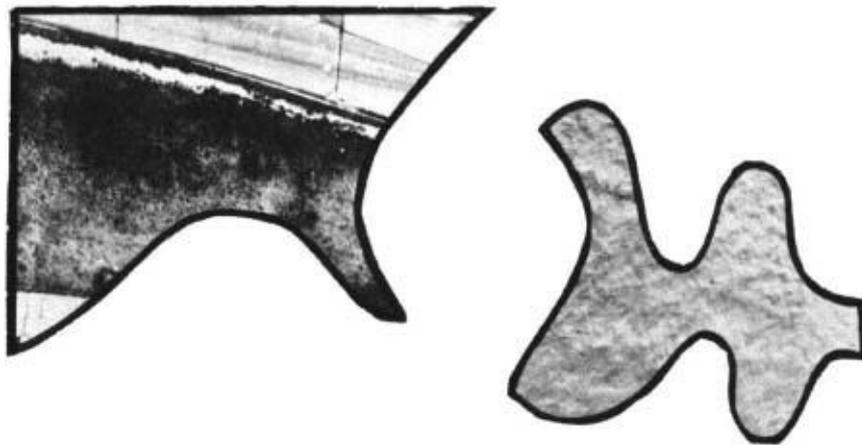
"Thank you," Krutch said. He offered his hand to Brown. "Detective Brown?" He retrieved his
hand, shook hands next with Carella. "Detective Carella?" Then he smiled his dazzling smile and went
out of the squadroom.

"What do you think?" Brown said.

"I don't know. What do *you* think?" Carella said.

"I don't know. Let's see what the lieutenant thinks."

Lieutenant Byrnes looked at the list of names, and then turned his attention to the two pieces of the photograph:



“Don’t even look like they *belong* together,” he muttered.

They had filled him in on Krutch’s story, and he had listened intently, head cocked slightly to one side, blue eyes shifting from Carella’s face to Brown’s as they alternately picked up threads of the narrative. He was a thickset man, Byrnes, with heavy hands, the backs of which were sprinkled with liver spots. His hair was going white, and he had a bald patch barely beginning to show at the back of his head. But there was a sense of contained power about him, the certain knowledge that he had broken many a hood’s nose before being promoted to his present desk job. Impatiently, he looked at the photograph segments again, turning each one on his desktop, trying to fit them together, and then giving up the job.

“Guy comes in here with a story,” Byrnes said, “what does he expect us to do? Drop everything and go on a goddamn treasure hunt?”

“Well,” Carella said, “there’s the possibility he’s right.”

“A pretty *slim* possibility, if you ask me. Where’d you say he got this story? From an old laundress who hardly speaks English, right?”

“That’s right.”

“But she told him in Italian,” Brown said. “She told him the picture shows where *il tesoro* was buried.”

“*Il tesoro*,” Carella corrected.

“Did she say that? Buried?”

“No. I don’t know. Hidden, I think she said. What’d she say, Steve?”

“Just that the picture shows where the treasure *is*, I think. That’s all.”

“She didn’t say buried, huh?”

“I don’t think so.”

“I just hate to put a man on this, and then...” Byrnes shook his head. “It’s not as if we’ve got nothing else to do around here, you know.”

The detectives were silent.

“Let’s say we search Ehrbach’s place,” Byrnes said. “And let’s say we *do* find a third piece of this picture, then what?”

“Then Krutch’s story begins to sound a little better,” Carella said.

“Yes, but where do we go from there?” Byrnes asked. “I’m willing to put you on it...okay, we don’t find anything, we’ve only wasted a day. But suppose we *do* find something, *then* what? The fellow...what’s his name?” Byrnes consulted the list again. “Weinberg. Albert Weinberg. He’s the next logical step. But Krutch says the man’s got an assault record, which means he can smell The Lab six blocks away. Whoever we send after him would have to use a cover, and I’d need a second man for a contact and drop. That’s two men out of action, maybe on a wild-goose chase.” He shook his head again. “I don’t know.” He looked down at the photograph segments and then up at Carella. “What’s your caseload like, Steve?”

“I’ve got that dry-cleaning store holdup, and the muggings over on Ainsley...six in the past two weeks, same m.o. I’ve also got a lead I want to run down on the pusher who’s been working the junior high school on Seventeenth. And there’re two cases coming to trial this month. I have to be in court on Tuesday, matter of fact.”

“What about you, Artie?”

“I forgot to mention...” Carella said.

“Yeah?”

“Couple of burglaries over in Smoke Rise. We’ve been getting a lot of static on those because the sister of a municipal judge lives in the neighborhood.”

“Yeah, so let Hizzoner go find the burglar,” Byrnes said dryly. “Artie?”

“A hit-and-run, a jewelry store holdup, and a knifing. I’m supposed to be in court tomorrow on the knifing. It’ll be a quick trial—the guy stabbed his wife when he found her in bed with another man.”

“You want to take a crack at this Weinberg character? Assuming we find anything in Ehrbach’s apartment?”

“Sure,” Brown said.

“Does Weinberg live in the precinct? Would he be likely to spot you as a cop?”

“I don’t know.”

“Check him out with the IB, see if they’ve got an address for him.”

“Right.”

“You’d better find out where he’s operated, too, which cities, and pick your cover accordingly. Don’t make it anything too big, Artie, don’t say you’re a mob gun from Chicago or anything like that. Be too simple for him to check if he’s got any connections at all. Make it a numbers runner, a small time pusher, something unimportant. You stumbled on your piece of the picture, you think Weinberg got another piece, and you want to team up with him. Keep it as simple as that.”

“Right.”

“Steve, you’ll have to be the outside man at the skunk works.”

“Fine.”

“Arrange a drop, and keep your contacts as few as possible. This guy Weinberg doesn’t sound like a customer to fool around with. And let’s not go overboard on this thing, okay? Let’s handle it in easy stages. If we don’t turn up anything at Ehrbach’s place, that’s it, back to the salt mines. If we h

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