

They Do It With Mirrors

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While I was failing at World-Saving, I was beginning to achieve my second objective: to spread out, not limit myself to pulp science fiction. **THEY DO IT WITH MIRRORS** was my first attempt in the crime-mystery field, and from it I learned three things: a) whodunnits are fairly easy to write and easy to sell; b) I was no threat to Raymond Chandler or Rex Stout as the genre didn't interest me that much; and c) Crime Does Not Pay—Enough (the motto of the Mystery Writers of America).

It may amuse you to know that this story was considered to be (in 1945) too risqué; the magazine editor laundered it before publication. You are seeing the original “dirty” version; try to find in it anything at all that could bring a blush to the cheek of your maiden aunt.

In late 1945 this magic mirror existed in a bar at (as I recall) the corner of Hollywood and Gower Gulch; the rest is fiction.

“Anything you get free costs more than

worth—but you don't find it out until later.”

—Bernardo de la Paz

—

THEY DO IT WITH MIRRORS

An Edison Hill Crime Case

I was there to see beautiful naked women. So was everybody else. It's a common failing.

I climbed on a stool at the end of the bar in Jack Joy's Joint and spoke to Jack himself, who was busy setting up two old-fashioned. "Make it three," I said. "No, make it four and have one with me. What's the pitch, Jack? I hear you set up a peep show for the suckers."

"Hi, Ed. Nope, it's not a peep show—it's Art."

"What's the difference?"

"If they hold still, it's Art. If they wiggle around, it's illegal. That's the ruling. Here." He handed me a program.

It read:

THE JOY CLUB

PRESENTS

The Magic Mirror

Beautiful Models in a series of Entertaining

and Artistic Pageants

10 p.m. "Aphrodite" Estelle

11 p.m. "Sacrifice to the Sun" Estelle and Hazel

12 p.m. "The High Priestess" Hazel

1 a.m. "The Altar Victim" Estelle

2 a.m. "Invocation to Pan" Estelle and Hazel

(Guests are requested to refrain stomping, whistling, or otherwise disturbing the artistic serenity of the presentations)

The last was a giggle. Jack's place was strictly a joint. But on the other side of the program I saw a new schedule of prices which informed me that the drink in my hand was going to cost me just twice

what I had figured. And the place was jammed. By suckers—including me.

I was about to speak to Jack, in a kindly way, promising to keep my eyes closed during the show and then pay the old price for my drink, when I heard two sharp beeps!—a high tension buzzer sound, like radio code— from a spot back of the bar. Jack turned away from me, explaining, “That’s the eleven o’clock show.” He busied himself underneath the bar.

Being at the end of the bar I could see under the long side somewhat. He had enough electrical gear there to make a happy Christmas for a Boy Scout—switches, a rheostat dingus, a turntable for recordings, and a hand microphone. I leaned over and sized it up. I have a weakness for gadgets, from my old man. He named me Thomas Alva Edison Hill in hopes that I would emulate his idol. I disappointed him—I didn’t invent the atom bomb, but I do sometimes try to repair my own typewriter.

Jack flipped a switch and picked up the hand mike. His voice came out of the juke box: “We now present the Magic Mirror.” Then the turntable picked up with Hymn to the Sun from Coqd’Or , and he started turning the rheostat slowly.

The lights went down in the joint and came up slowly in the Magic Mirror. The “Mirror” was actually a sheet of glass about ten feet wide and eight high which shut off a little balcony stage. When the house lights were on bright and the stage was dark, you could not see through the glass at all; it looked like a mirror. As the house lights went out and the stage lights came on, you could see through the glass and a picture slowly built up in the “Mirror.”

Jack had a single bright light under the bar which lighted him and the controls and which did not go out

with the house lights. Because of my position at the end of the bar it hit me square in the eye. I had to block it with my hand to see the stage.

It was something to see.

Two girls, a blonde and a brunette. A sort of altar table, with the blonde sprawled across it, voluptuously. The brunette standing at the end of the altar, grabbing the blonde by the hair with one hand while holding a fancy dagger upraised with the other. There was a backdrop in gold and dark blue—a sunburst in a phony Aztec or Egyptian design, but nobody was looking at it; they were looking at the girls.

The brunette was wearing a high show-girl head dress, silver sandals, and a G-string in glass jewels. Nothing more. No sign of a brassiere. The blonde was naked as an oyster, with her downstage knee drawn just enough to get past sufficiently broad-minded censors.

But I was not looking at the naked blonde; I was looking at the brunette.

It was not just the two fine upstanding breasts or the long graceful legs nor the shape of her hips and thighs; it was the overall effect. She was so beautiful. I heard somebody say, “Great jumping jeebers!” and was about to shush him when I realized it was me.

Then the lights went down and I remembered to breathe.

I paid the clip price for my drink without a quiver and Jack assured me: “They are hostesses between

shows.” When they showed up at the stairway leadin ~ down from the balcony hesignalled them to come ove ~ and then introduced me.

“Hazel Dorn, Estelle d’Arcy—meetEddie Hill.”

Hazel, the brunette, said, “How do you do?” butth blonde said,

“Oh, I’ve met the Ghost before. How’s businessRattled any chains lately?”

I said, “Good enough,” and let it pass. I knew her al

right—but as Audrey Johnson, not as Estelle d’Arcy. She had been a steno at the City Hall ~when I was doing an autobiography of the Chief of Police. I had not liked her much; she had an instinct for finding a sore point and picking at it.

I am not ashamed of being a ghost writer, nor is it a secret. You will find my name on the title page of Forty Years a Cop as well as the name of the Chief—in small print but it is there: “with Edison Hill.”

“How did you like the show?” Hazel asked, when I had ordered a round.

“Ilikedyou ,” I said, softly enough to keep it private. “I can’t wait for the next show to see more of you.”

“You’ll see more,” she admitted and changed the subject. I gathered an impression that she was proud of her figure and liked to be told she was beautiful but was not entirely calloused about exhibiting it in public.

Estelle leaned across the bar to Jack. “Jackie Boy,” she said in sweetly reasonable tones, “you held the lights too long again. It doesn’t matter to me in that pose, but you had poor old Hazel trembling like a leaf before you doused theglim .”

Jack set a three-minute egg timer, like a little hourglass on the bar. “Three minutes it says—three minutes you did.”

“I don’t think it was more than three minutes,” Hazel objected. “I wasn’t tired.”

“You were trembling, dear. I saw you. You mustn’t tire yourself—it makes lines. Anyhow,” she added, “I’ll just keep this,” and she put the egg timer in her purse. “We’ll time it ourselves.”

“It was three minutes,” Jack insisted.

“Never mind,” she answered. “From now on it’ll be three minutes, or mamma will have to lock Jackie in the dark closet.”

Jack started to answer, thought better of it,then walked away to the other end of the bar. Estelle shrugged, then threw down the rest of her drink ~ left us. I saw her speak to Jack again,then join so customers at one of the tables.

Hazel looked at her as she walked away. “I’d pad thatchippie’s pants,” she muttered, “if she wore an

“A bum beef?”

“Not exactly. Maybe Jack is a friend of yours— “Just an acquaintance.”

“Well . . . I’ve had worse bosses—but he is a bit(jerk . Maybe he doesn’t stretch the poses just out meanness—I’ve never timed him—but some ofth poses are too long for three minutes. Take Estel Aphroditepose— you saw it?”

‘ ‘I’Jo.’ ~

“She balances on the ball of one foot, nocostum all, but with one leg raised enough to furnish a figli Jack’s got a blackout switch to cover her if shebre ~ but, just the same, it’s a strain.”

“To coverhimself with the cops, you mean.”

“Well, yes. Jack wants us to make it just asstronl the vice squad will stand for.”

“You ought not to be in a dive like this. Youough have a movie contract.”

She laughed without mirth. “Eddie, did you ever to get a movie contract? I’ve tried.”

“Just the same—oh, well! But why are youorc Estelle? What you told me doesn’t seem to coveri

“She— Skip it. She probably means well.”

“You mean she shouldn’t have dragged you intoi

“Partly.”

“What else?”

“Oh, nothing—look, do you think I need anywrin remover?” I examined her quite closely, until she tually blushed a little, then assured her that she not.

“Thanks,” she said. “Estelle evidently thinksShe’s been advising me to take care of myself lat and has been bringing me little presents ofbea

preparations. I thank her for them and it appears to be sheer friendliness on her part...but it makes me squirm.

I nodded and changed the subject. I did not want to talk about Estelle; I wanted to talk about her—and me. I mentioned an agent I knew (my own) who could help her and that got her really interested, if not in me, at least in what I was saying.

Presently she glanced at the clock back of the bar and squealed. “I’ve got to peel for the customers. ‘Bye now!’” It was five minutes to twelve. I shifted from the end of the bar to the long side, just opposite Jack’s Magic Mirror controls. I did not want that bright light of his interfering with me seeing Hazel.

It was just about twelve straight up when Jack came up from the rear of the joint, elbowed his other

barman out of the way, and took his place near the controls. "Just about that time," he said to me. "Has she rung the buzzer?"

"Not a buzz."

"Okay, then." He cleared dirty glasses off the top of the bar while we waited, changed the platter on the turntable, and generally messed around. I kept my eyes on the mirror.

I heard the two beeps! sharp and clear. When he did not announce the show at once, I glanced around and saw that, while he had the mike in his hand, he was staring past it at the door, and looking considerably upset.

There were two cops just inside the door, Hannegan and Feinstein, both off the beat. I supposed he was afraid of a raid, which was silly. Pavement pounders don't pull raids. I knew what they were there for, even before Hannegan gave Jack a broad grin and waved him the okay sign—they had just slipped in for a free gander at the flesh under the excuse of watching the public morals.

"We now present the Magic Mirror," said Jack's

voice out of the juke box. Somebody climbed onto stool beside me and slipped a hand under my arm. I looked around. It was Hazel.

"You're not here; you're up there," I said focishly.

"Huh-uh. Estelle said—I'll tell you after the show. The lights were coming up in the Mirror and the juke box was cranking out Valse Triste. The altar was in the scene, too, and Estelle was sprawled over it much as she had been before. As it got lighter you could see red stain down her side and the prop dagger. Hazel had told me what each of the acts were; this was the one called "The Altar Victim," scheduled for the 10 o'clock show.

I was disappointed not to be seeing Hazel, but I had to admit it was good—good theater, of the nasty sort of sadism and sex combined. The red stuff—catsup guessed—trickling down her bare side and the hand of the prop dagger sticking up as if she had been stabbed through—the customers liked it. It was an awful follow-up to the "Sacrifice to the Sun".

Hazel screamed in my ear.

Her first scream was solo. The next thing I can recall—it seemed as if every woman in the place was screaming—soprano, alto, and some tenor, but most screeching soprano. Through it came the bull voice of Hannegan. "Keep your seats, folks! Somebody turn the lights!"

I grabbed Hazel by the shoulders and shook her. "What's the matter? What's up?"

She looked dazed, then pointed at the Mirror. "She's dead... she's dead... she's dead!" she chanted. She scrambled down from the stool and took out for it back of the house. I started after her. The house lights came on abruptly, leaving the Mirror lights still on.

We finished one, two, three, up the stairway through a little dressing room, and onto the stage almost caught up with Hazel, and Feinstein was doing on my heels.

We stood there, jammed in the door, blinking at the flood lights, and not liking what we saw under

them. She was dead all right. The dagger, which should have been faked between her arm and her breast with catsup spilled around to maintain the illusion—this prop dagger, this slender steel blade, was three inches closer to her breastbone than it should have been. It had been stabbed straight into her heart.

On the floor at the side of the altar away from the audience, close enough to Estelle to reach it, was the egg timer. As I looked at it the last of the sand ran out.

I caught Hazel as she fell—she was a big armful—and spread her on the couch. “Eddie,” said Feinstein, “call the Station for me. Tell Hannegan not to let anyone out. I’m staying here.” I called the station but did not have to tell Hannegan anything. He had them all seated again and was jollyng them along. Jack was still standing back of the bar, shock on his face, and the bright light at the control board making him look like a death’s head.

By twelve-fifteen Spade Jones, Lieutenant Jones of Homicide, showed up and from there on things slipped into a smooth routine. He knew me well, having helped me work up some of the book I did for the Chief, and he grabbed onto me at once for some of the background. By twelve-thirty he was reasonably sure that none of the customers could have done it. “I won’t say one of them didn’t do it, Eddie my boy—anybody could have done it who knew the exact second to slip upstairs, grab the knife, and slide it into her ribs. But the chances are against any of them knowing just when and how to do it.”

“Anybody inside or outside,” I corrected.

“So?”

“There’s a fire exit at the foot of the stairs.”

“You think I haven’t noticed that?” He turned away and gave Hannegan instructions to let anybody go who could give satisfactory identification with a local address. The others would have to go downtown to

have closer ties as material witnesses put on them in the night court. Perhaps some would land in theta] for further investigation, but in any case—clear ‘e out!

The photographers were busy upstairs and so were the fingerprint boys. The Assistant Medical Examiner showed up, followed by reporters. A few minutes later after the house was cleared, Hazel came downstairs and joined me. Neither of us said anything, but I patted her on the back. When they carried down the stretcher a little later, with a blanket-wrappshape in it, I put my arm around her while she buried her eyes in my shoulders.

Spade talked to us one at a time. Jack was notta jing. “It ain’t smart to talk without a lawyer,” was Spade could get out of him. I thought to myself that would be better to talk to Spade now than to sweated and maybe massaged a little under the rug. My testimony would clear him even though it would show that there was a spat between him and Estel. Spade would not frame a man. He was an honest cop as cops go. I’ve known honest cops. Two, I think.

Spade took my story, then he took Hazel’s, and he called me back. “Eddie my boy,” he said, “help me get into this thing. As I understand it, this girl Hazel should have had the twelve o’clock show.”

“That’s right.”

He studied one of the Joy Club’s programs. “Hazel says she went upstairs to undress for the show at eleven-fifty-five.”

“Exactly that time.”

“Yeah. She was with you, wasn't she? She says she went up and that Estelle followed her in with a song and dance that the boss said to swap the two shows around.”

“I wouldn't know about that.”

“Naturally not. She says she beefed a little but got in and came on downstairs, where she joined you. Correct?”

“Correct.”

“Mmmm. . . By the way, your remark about the fire door might lead to something. Hazel put me onto a boy friend for Estelle. Trumpeter in that rat race across the street. He could have ducked across and stabbed her. Wouldn't take long. Trumpet players can't be pushing wind all the time; they'd lose their lip.”

“How would he know when to do it? It was supposed to be Hazel's show.”

“Mmmm. . . Well, maybe he did know. Swapping shows sounds like Estelle had made a date, and that sounds like a man. In which case he'd know about it. One of the boys is looking into it. Now about the way these shows worked—do you suppose you could show me how they were staged? Hannegan tried it but all he got was a shock.”

“I'll try it,” I said, getting up. “It's nothing very fancy. Did you ask Jack about Hazel's statement that Estelle had permission from him to swap the shows?”

“That's the one thing he cracked on. He states flatly that he didn't know that the shows were swapped. He says he expected to see Hazel in the Mirror.”

The controls looked complicated but weren't. I showed Jones the rheostat and told him it enabled Jack to turn either set of lights down slowly while the other set went up. I found a bypass switch back of the rheostat which accounted for the present condition— all lights burning brightly, house and stage. There was a blackout switch and there was a switch that cut the hand microphone and the turntable in through the juke box. Near the latter was the buzzer—a small black case with two binding posts—which the girls used to signal Jack. Centered on the under side of the bar was a hundred-and-fifty watt bulb hooked in on its own line separate from the rheostat. Except for the line to this light all the wires from all the equipment disappeared into a steel conduit underneath the bar. It was this light which had dazzled me during the

eleven o'clock show. It seemed excessive; a pear bulb would have been more appropriate. Apparently Jack liked lots of light.

I explained the controls to Spade, then gave him a dry run. First I switched the rheostat back to “House” and threw off the bypass switch, leaving the house brightly lighted and the Magic Mirror dark. “That's five minutes of twelve. Hazel leaves me to go upstairs. I shift around to the bar stool just opposite where I am now standing. At midnight Jack comes and asks me if I've heard the buzzer. I say ‘No.’ He fiddles around a bit, clearing away glasses and stuff like that. Then come two beeps on the buzzer. He picks the microphone but he doesn't announce the show a few seconds—he's just noticed Hannegan and Feinstein. Hannegan gives him the high sign and gets ahead.” Then I picked up the mike myself and spoke into it:

“We now present the Magic Mirror!”

I put down the mike and flipped on the turntable switch. The same platter was on and the jukebox started playing Valse Triste. Hazel looked up at me sharply, from where she had been resting her head on her arms a few tables away. She looked horrified, and

the reconstruction were too much for her stomach. I turned the rheostat slowly from “House”

“Stage.” The room darkened and the stage lights came on. “That’s all there was to it,” I said. “Hazel sat down beside me just as Jack announced the show. As lights came on she screamed.”

Spade scratched his chin. “You say Joy was staring in front of you when the buzzer signal came from upstairs?”

“Positive.”

“You gave him a motive—the war he was having with Estelle. But you’ve given him an alibi too.”

“That’s right. Either Estelle punched that buzzer herself, then lay down and stabbed herself, or she was murdered and the murderer punched it to cover it up and ducked out while everybody had their eyes on the Mirror. Either way I had Jack Joy in sight.”

“It’s an alibi all right,” he conceded. “Unless you were in cahoots with him,” he said hopefully.

“Prove it,” I answered, grinning. “Not with him. I think he’s a jerk.”

“We’re all jerks, more or less, Eddie my boy. Let’s look around upstairs.”

I switched the bypass, leaving both stage and house lights, and followed him. I pointed out the buzzer to him, after searching for it myself. A conduit came up through the floor and ended in a junction box on the wall, from which cords ran to the flood lights. The button was on the junction box. I wondered why it was not on the “altar,” then saw that the altar was a movable prop. Apparently the girls punched the button, then fell quickly into their poses. Spade tried the button meditatively, then wiped print powder off on his trousers. “I can’t hear it,” he said.

“Naturally not. This stage is almost a soundproof booth.”

He had seen the egg timer but I had not told him until then about seeing the last of the sand run out. He pursed his lips. “You’re sure?”

“Call it hallucination. I think I saw it. I’ll testify to it.”

He sat down on the altar, avoiding the blood stain, and said nothing for quite a long time. Finally he said, "Eddie my boy—"

"Yes?"

"You've not only given Jack Joy an alibi, you've damn' near made it impossible for anyone to have done it."

"I know it. Could it have been suicide?"

"Could be. Could be. From the mechanics angle but not from the psychological angle. Would she have started that egg timer for her own suicide? Another thing. Take a look at that blood. Taste it."

"Huh?"

"Don't throw up. Smell it then."

I did, very gingerly. Then I smelled it again. T' smells. Tomato. Blood. Blood and tomatocatsur thought I could detect differences in appearance well. "You see, son? If she's going to have blood on I chest she won't bother with catsup. Aside from ti and the timer it's a perfect, dramatic, female-style:

icide. But it won't wash. It's murder, Eddie." Feinstein stuck his head in. "Lieutenant—" "What is it?"

"That musician punk. He had a date with her right."

"Oh, he did, eh?"

"But he's clear. The band was on the air at midnig in a number that features him in a trumpet solo."

"Damn! Get out of here."

"That ain't all. I called the Assistant Medical Iaminer, like you said. The motive you suggested wo go—she not only wasn't expecting; she hadn't e' been had. Virgointacta," he added in passable hi school Latin.

"Feinstein, you'll be wanting to be a sergeant ne ~ Spade answered placidly, "using big words liketh Get out."

"Okay, Lieutenant." I was more than a little s
prised at the news. I would have picked Estelle a
case of round heels. Evidently she was a tease in m~
way than one.

Spade sat a while longer, then said, "When it's li1 in here, it's dark out there; when it's light out the it s dark in here.

"That's right. Ordinarily, that is. Right now we got both sides lighted with the bypass."

“Ordinarily is what I mean. Light, dark; dark, hg Eddie my boy—”

“Yes?”

“Are you sweet on that Hazel girl?”

“I’m leaning that way,” I admitted.

“Then keep an eye on her. The murderer was in K

for just a few seconds—the egg timer and the buzzer prove that. He wasn’t any of thefei ~~~ people who knew about the swap in the shows—not since the trumpet playing boy friend got knocked out of the running. And it was dark. He murdered the wrong party, Eddie my boy. There’s another murder coming up.”

“Hazel,” I said slowly.

“Yes, Hazel.”

Spade Jones shooed us all home, me, Hazel, the two waiters, the other barman, and Jack Joy. I think he was tempted to hold Jack simply because he wouldn’t talk but he compromised by telling him that if he stuck his head outside his hotel, he would find a nice policeman ready to take him down to a nice cell. He tipped me a wink and put a finger on his lips as he said good night to me.

But I didn’t keep quiet. Hazel let me take her home readily enough. When I saw that she lived alone in a single apartment in a building without a doorman, I decided it called for an all night vigil and some explaining.

She stepped into the kitchenette and mixed me a drink. “One drink and out you go, Ed,” she called to me. “You’ve been very sweet and I want to see you again and thank you, but tonight this girl goes to bed. I’m whipped.”

“I’m staying all night,” I announced firmly.

She came out with a drink in her hand and looked at me, both annoyed and a little puzzled. “Ed,” she said, “aren’t you working just a bit too fast? I didn’t think you were that clumsy.”

“Calm yourself, beautiful,” I told her. “It’s not necessarily a proposition. I’m going to watch over you. Somebody is trying to kill you.”

She dropped the drink.

I helped her clean it up and explained the situation. “Somebody stabbed a girl in a dark room,” I finished. “That somebody thought it was you. He knows better by now and he will be looking for a chance to finish the

job. What you and I have got to figure out is: Wd wants to kill you?”

She sat down and started to manhandle a handk chief. “Nobody wants to kill me, Eddie. It was Itelle
.”

“No, it wasn’t.”

“But it couldn’t have been me. I know.”

“What do you know?”

“I— Oh, it’s impossible. Stay all night if you want to. You can sleep on the couch.” She got up and pulled the bed down out of the wall, closed the door, and splashed around for a while. “That bathtub is too small to dress and undress in,” she stated flat “Anyhow I sleep raw. If you want to get undressed you won’t scare me.”

I said. “I’ll take my coat and tie and shirt

“Suit yourself.” Her voice was a little bit smother as she was already wiggling her dress over her head

She wore pants, whether Estelle ever did or not plain, white knit that looked clean and neat. She could not wear a brassiere and did not need to. The conception I had gotten of her figure in the Magic Mirror was entirely justified. She was simply the most magnificent beautiful thing I had ever seen in my life. In street clothes she was a beautiful, well-built woman in her skin—wars have started over less.

I was beginning to doubt my ability to stay on the couch. I must have showed it, for she snorted, “With the drool off your chin!” and stepped out of pants.

“Scuse, please,” I answered and started unlacing my shoes. She stepped over and switched off the light then went over to the one big window and raised the shade. It was closed but, with the light out, you could see outside easily. “Stand back from that window,” she said. “You’re too good a target.”

“Huh? Oh, very well.” She backed up a few steps

and continued to stare thoughtfully out the window. I stared thoughtfully at her. There was a big neon sign across the street and the colored lights, pouring in the window, covered her from head to foot with a rosy liquid glow. She looked like something out of a dream of fairyland.

Presently I wasn’t thinking how she looked; I was thinking about another room, where a girl had lain murdered, with the lights of a night club shining through a pane of glass, shining through like this neon.

My thoughts rearranged themselves rapidly and very painfully. I added them up a second time and still got the same answer. I did not like the answer. I was glad, damn glad, she was bare naked, with no way to conceal a gun, or a knife, or any other sort of deadly weapon. “Hazel,” I said softly.

She turned to me. “Yes, Eddie?”

“I’ve just had a new idea. . . why should anyone want to kill you?”

“You said that before. There isn’t any reason.”

“I know. You’re right; there isn’t any. But put it this way—why should you want to kill Estelle?”

I thought she was going to faint again, but I didn’t care—I wanted to shock her. Her lusciousness

meant nothing to me now but a trap that had confused my thoughts. I had not wanted to think her guilty, so I had disregarded the fact that of all the persons involved she was the only one with the necessary opportunity, the knowledge of the swapped shows, and at least some motive. She had made it plain that she detested Estelle. She had covered it up but it was still evident.

But most important of all, the little stage had not been dark! True, it looked dark—from the outside. You can't see through glass when all the light comes from one side and you are on that same side—but light passes through the glass just the same. The neon on the street illuminated this room we were in fairly brightly; the brilliant lights of Jack's bar illuminated the little stage even when the stage floodlights were out.

She knew that. She knew it because she had been there many times, getting ready to pose for these customers. Therefore she knew that it was not a case of mistaken identity in the dark—there was no dark! And it would have to be nearly pitch black for anyone to mistake Hazel's blue-black mane for Estelle's peroxide mop.

She knew—why hadn't she said so? She wanted me to stay all night, not wanting me around but for her reputation and more, because I had propounded the wrong-girl-in-the-dark theory. She knew it would not hold water; why had she not said so?

"Eddie, have you gone crazy?" Her voice was frigid.

"No—gone sane. I'll tell you how you did it, beautiful darling. You both were there—you admitted that. Estelle got in her pose, and asked you to punch the buzzer. You did—but first you grabbed the knife and slid it in her ribs. You wiped the handle, looked around, punched the buzzer, and slammed. About ten seconds later you were slipping your arm in mine—your alibi!"

"It had to be you," I went on, "for no one else would have had the guts to commit murder with nothing but glass between him and an audience. The stage was lighted—from the outside. You knew that, but it didn't worry you. You were used to parading around naked in front of that glass, certain you could not be seen while the house lights were on! No one else would have dared!"

She looked at me as if she could not believe her ears and her chin began to quiver. Then she squatted down on the floor and burst into tears. Real tears—tears dripped. It was my cue to go soft, but I did not. I do not like killing.

I stood over her. "Why did you kill her? Why did you kill her?"

"Get out of here."

"Not likely. I'm going to see you fry, my big-busted angel." I headed for the telephone, keeping my eyes on her. I did not dare turn my back, even naked as she was.

She made a break, but it was not for me; it was for the door. How far she thought she could get in the buff I don't know.

I tripped her and fell on her. She was a big armful and ready to bite and claw, but I got a hammer lock on one arm and twisted it. "Be good," I warned her, "or I'll break it."

She lay still and I began to be aware that she was not only an armful but a very female armful. I ignored it. "Let me go, Eddie," she said in a tense whisper, "or I'll scream rape and get the cops in."

"Go right ahead, gorgeous," I told her. "The cops are just what I want, and quick."

"Eddie, Eddie, listen to reason—I didn't kill her, but I know who did."

"Huh?Who?"

"I know.. I do know—but he couldn't have. That's why I haven't said anything."

"Tell me."

She didn't answer at once; I twisted her arm. "Tell me!"

"Oh! It was Jack."

"Jack? Nonsense—I was watching him."

"I know. But he did it, just the same. I don't know how—but he did it."

I held her down, thinking. She watched my face. "Ed?"

"Huh?"

"If I punched the buzzer, wouldn't my fingerprint be on it?"

"Should be."

"Why don't you find out?"

Itstonkered me.I thought I was right butsi seemed quite willing to make the test. "Get up," Isai "On your knees and then on your feet. But don't try get your arm free and don't try any tricks, or, so he me, I'll kick you in the belly."

She was docile enough and I moved us over toti phone,dialled it with one hand and managed to get Spade Jones through the police exchange. "SpadThisis Eddie—Eddie Hill. Was there a fingerprint the buzzer button?"

"Now I wondered when you would begetti] around to thinking of that. There was."

"Whose?"

"Thecorpse's."

"Estelle's?"

"The same.And Estelle's on the egg timer. None the knife—wiped clean.Lots from both girlsaroui the room, and a few odd ones—old, probably."

"Uh.. yes . . . well , thanks."

“Not at all. Call me if you get any bright ideas, son I hung up the phone and turned to Hazel. I guess ~ had let go her arm when Spade told me the print w not hers, but I don’t remember doing so. She w standing there, rubbing her arm and looking at me a very odd way. “Well,” I said, “you can twist my an or kick me anywhere you like. I was wrong. I’m son I’ll try to prove it to you.”

She started to speak and then started to leak tea again. It finished up with her accepting my apology the nicest way possible, smearing me with lipstickai tears. I loved it and I felt like a heel.

Presently I wiped her face with my handkerchi and said, “You put on a robe or something and sit the bed and I’ll sit on the couch. We’ve got to dopetF out and I can think better with that lovely chassis yours covered up.”

She trotted obediently and I sat down. “You s

Jack killed her, but you admit you don’t know how he could have done it. Then why do you think he did?”

“The music.”

~ 1

Hun?

“The music he played for the show was Valse Triste . That’s Estelle’s music, for Estelle’s act. My act, the regular twelve o’clock act, calls for Bolero. He must have known that Estelle was up there; he used the right music.”

“Then you figure he must have been lying when he claimed Estelle never arranged with him to swap the shows. But it’s a slim reason to hang a man—he might have gotten that record by accident.”

“Could, but not likely. The records were kept in order and were the same ones for the same shows every night. Nobody touched them but him. He would fire a man for touching anything around the control box. However,” she went on, “I knew it had to be him before I noticed the music. Only it couldn’t be.”

“Only it couldn’t be. Go ahead.”

“He hated her.”

“Why?”

“She teased him.”

““She teased him.’ Suppose she did. Lots of people get teased. She teased lots of people. She teased you. She teased me. So what?”

“It’s not the same thing,” she insisted. “Jack was afraid of the dark.”

It was a nasty story. The hunk was afraid of total darkness, really afraid, the way some kids are.

Hazel told me he would not go back of the building to get his parked car at night without a flashlight. But that would not have given away his weakness, nor the fact that he was ashamed of it—lots of people use flashlights freely, just to be sure of their footing. But he had fallen for Estelle and apparently made a lot of progress—had actually gotten into bed with her. It never came to anything because she had snapped out the

lights. Estelle had told Hazel about it, gloating over the fact that she had found out about what she term his cowardice “soon enough.”

“She needed him after that,” Hazel went

“Nothing that anyone could tumble to, if they did know. But he knew. He was afraid of her, afraid to face her for fear she would tell. He hated her—at the same time he wanted her and was jealous of her. There was one time in the dressing room. I was there—” He had come in while they were dressing, or undressing, and had picked a fight with Estelle over one of the customers. She told him to get out. When he did not do so she snapped out the light. “He went out of there like a jack rabbit, falling over his feet.” She stopped. “How about it, Eddie? Motive enough?”

“Motive enough,” I agreed. “You’ve got me think he did it. Only he couldn’t.”

“‘Only he couldn’t.’ That’s the trouble.”

I told her to get into bed and try to get some sleep that I planned to sit right where I was till the piece fitted. I was rewarded with another sight of the customer as she chucked the robe, then I helped myself a good-night kiss. I don’t think she slept; at least she did not snore.

I started pounding my brain. The fact that the stage was not dark when it seemed dark changed the picture and eliminated, I thought, everyone not familiar with the mechanics of the Mirror. It left only Hazel, Jack, the other barman, the two waiters—and Estelle herself. It was physically possible for an unknown stranger to have slipped upstairs, slid the shiv in and ducked downstairs, but psychologically—no. I made mental note to find out what other models had worked in the Mirror.

The other barman and the two waiters had been eliminated—all of them had been fully alibied by one or more customers. I had alibied Jack. Estelle—well, it wasn’t suicide. And Hazel.

If Estelle’s fingerprint meant what it seemed; Ha:

was out—not time enough to commit a murder, arrange a corpse, wipe a handle, and get downstairs to my side before Jack started the show.

But in that case nobody could have done it—except a hypothetical sex maniac who did not mind a spot of butchery in front of a window full of people. Nonsense!

Of course the fingerprint was not conclusive. Hazel could have pushed the button with a coin or a bobby pin, without destroying an old print or making a new one. I hated to admit it but she was not clear yet.

Again, if Estelle did not push the button, then it looked still more like an insider; an outsider would not know where to find the button nor have any reason to push it.

For that matter, why should Hazel push it? It had not given her an alibi—it didn’t make sense.

Round and round and round till my head ached.

It was a long time later that I went over and tugged at the covers."Hazel —"

"Yes, Eddie?"

"Who punched the buzzer in the eleven o'clock show?"

She considered. "That show is both of us. She did— she always took charge."

"Mmmm... What other girls have worked in the Mirror?"

"Why, none. Estelle and I opened the show."

"Okay. Maybe I've got it. Let's call Spade Jones."

Spade assured me he would be only too happy to get out of a warm bed to play games with me and would I like a job waking the bugler, too? But he agreed to come to the Joy Club, with Joy in tow, and to fetch enough flat feet, fire arms, and muscles to cope.

I was standing back of the bar in the Joy Club, with Hazel seated where she had been when she screamed and a cop from the Homicide Squad inniy seat. Jack and Spade were at the end of the bar, where Spade could see.

"We will now show how a man can be two places at

onetime," I announced. "I am now Mr. Jack Joy. I time is shortly before midnight. Hazel has just left 1 dressing room and come downstairs. She stops off a moment at the little girls room at the foot of 1 stairs, and thereby misses Jack, who is headed those same stairs. He goes up and finds Estelle in 1 dressing room, peeled and ready for her act—probly."

I took a glance at Jack. His face was a taut mask, I he was a long way from breaking. "There was an gument —what about, I don't know, but it might h2 been over the trumpet boy she had swapped shows meet. In any case, I am willing to bet that she stops it by switching out the dressing room light to ch ~ him out."

First blood. He flinched at that—his mask crack "He didn't stay out more than a few moments," I w~ on. "Probably he had a flashlight in his pocket—h probably got one on him now—and that let him back into that terrible, dark room, and switch on 1 light. Estelle was already on the stage, anointing h self with catsup, and almost ready to push the buz2 She must have been about to do so, for she had star the egg timer. He grabbed the prop dagger a stabbed her, stabbed her dead."

I stopped. No blood from Jack this time. His m~ was on firmly. "He arranges her in the pose—ten s onds for that; it was nothing but a sprawl—wipes handle and ducks out. Ten seconds more to this spOr make it twenty. He asks me if the buzzer I sounded and I tell him No. He really had to know, Estelle might have punched it before he got to he

"Hearing the answer he wanted, he bustlesaroi ~ a bit like this—" I monkeyed with some glassware ~ picked up a bar spoon and pointed with it to the sta "Note that the Mirror is lighted and empty—I've.the bypass on. Imagine it dark, with Estelle on the tar, a knife in her heart." I dropped the spoon do and,

while their eyes were still on the Mirror, Ibrou ~

metalspoon across the two binding posts which carried the two leads to the push button on the stage. The buzzer gave out with a loud beep! I broke the connection by lifting the spoon for a split second, and brought it down again for a second beep! "And that is how a man can—Catchhim, Spade!"

Spade was at him before I yelled. The three cops had him helpless in no time. He was not armed; it had been sheer reflex—a break for freedom. But he was not giving up, even now. "You've got nothing on me. No evidence. Anybody could have jimmied those wires anywhere along the line."

"No, Jack," I contradicted. "I checked for that. Those wires run through the same steel conduit as the power wires, all the way from the control box to the stage. It was here or there, Jack. It couldn't be there; it had to be here."

He shut up. "I want to see my lawyer," was his only answer.

"You'll see your lawyer," Spade assured him jovially. "Tomorrow, or the next day. Right now you're going to go downtown and sit under some nice hot lights for a few hours."

"No, Lieutenant!" It was Hazel.

"Eh? And why not, Miss Dorn?"

"Don't put him under lights. Shut him in a dark closet!"

"Eh? Well, I'll be—That's what I call a bright girl!" It was the mop closet they used. He lasted thirteen minutes, then he started to whimper and then to scream. They let him out and took his confession.

I was almost sorry for him when they led him away. I should not have been—second degree was the most he could get as premeditation was impossible to prove and quite unlikely anyhow. "Not guilty by reason of insanity" was a fair bet. Whatever his guilt, that woman had certainly driven him to it. And imagine the nerve of the man, the pure colossal nerve, that enabled him to go through with lighting up that stage

just after he looked up and saw two cops standing:

side the door!

I took Hazel home the second time. The bed was still pulled down and she went straight for it, kicking her shoes as she went. She unzipped the side of I dress and started to pull it over her head, when she stopped. "Eddie!"

"Yes, Beautiful?"

"If I take off my clothes again, are you going to accuse me of another murder?"

I considered this. "That depends," I informed her "on whether you are really interested in me, or in the agent I was telling you about."

She grinned at me, then scooped up a shoe and threw it. "In you, you lug!" Then she went onshucking off

her clothes. After a bit I unlaced my shoes.