

By DAY KEENE

I held my hands in the air while the blond took my gun and the three grand from my pocket

# The Cop and the Doll

She had been nude when the police lifted her from the river. The county had provided a sheet. Its upper hem failed by an inch to cover the small sullen mouth a thin-bladed knife had left just under her left breast.

“Pop” Hayes sucked at his teeth as he admired her. “A little honey, eh, sergeant?”

Joe Gibbs was staked out in back of a screen. He poked his head around the edge

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and said, "Of all the screw-ball ideas! Watch close. Look for some sign of guilt, the lieutenant tells me. What's he expect the killer to do? Walk in here, take a quick look at the doll, then jump up and down shouting, 'Goody. I see you have found Genevieve.'"

Pop Hayes laughed.

Gibbs appealed to me. "You don't happen to know her, do you, sergeant?"

"No. I can't say I do," I lied.

Pop Hayes sucked his teeth again. "Funny no one's identified her. Someone ought to know her. A doll that pretty couldn't walk two blocks without twenty men turning around to take a second look at her gams."

GIBBS came out from behind the screen. "Okay, Pop. You do the detecting for ten minutes. Just show 'em her legs. I'm going across the street and get a cup of coffee."

Pop called after him, "You'd better get some Sen Sen while you're at it. That 'coffee' you had a half an hour ago still smells."

I asked him if there had been any tentative identifications and the old man consulted his register. "Well, not exactly," he told me. "But the Mesdames Hooper and Carlson, two housefraus who dropped in for a bang, thought she looked something like a Mrs. Tafano who lives out on the south side somewhere. They didn't know the address."

"And that's as close as you've come?"

"That's as close as we've come."

With a last admiring look he pushed Margie back in the cold vault and showed

me the stiff I'd come to see. It was Schaller.

The wagon boys had picked him out of a West Madison Street fleabag. I x-ed him off the wanted list. And that was that. It was past quitting time. I called the Bureau on Schaller and went home.

Sally had Bettina in bed and supper on the table. I kissed the kid goodnight and sat down to the cold cuts and potato salad. The cold cuts tasted like leather.

"A hard day?" Sally asked.

"Oh, just so so," I lied.

I hoped I never had a tougher day. Sweat still trickled down my spine whenever I thought of Margie. Cold sweat. After all these years she still retained her power to hurt me. Those slim white fingers still had strength enough to reach out of the cold vault and push me into a cell—the big one.

The night was hot and sticky. To identify Margie or not—that was the question. I was still kicking it around long after Sally went to sleep. It wasn't simple. Either way I was stuck.

I didn't owe Margie a thing. Still, she had been my wife. I had kissed that petal-white flesh. I had fondled that long blond hair.

I couldn't allow her to go nameless, unavenged, to an unmarked pauper's grave. On the other hand I faced two problems.

One, disgrace and the chair for myself if I identified her and the killer was never tagged. Two, heartbreak and misery for Sally. Sally was jealous, insanely so. And just how did a man tell his wife her need for worry was over, that the girl she'd

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supplanted was dead, found naked and nameless in the river, a knife wound under one breast.

I killed the last of the beer in the ice-box and tiptoed into the bedroom. Sally was as dark as Margie was fair. She was my wife. I loved her. We had a child. We were going to have another. But I had never been able to convince her that Margie was entirely out of my system. If she ever learned I had seen Margie a few nights before, alone in a third-rate hotel room, she never would believe me. And her doubt would make both of our lives miserable.

Sally never failed to bring up Margie whenever we had a quarrel. *"That first love of yours,"* Sally called her. *"The little tramp who shared a fox-hole with you while you were overseas."*

That much was true. I had been in love with Margie. Perhaps if we had had a child Margie would have stayed in love with me.

But she had been so young. The future was so uncertain. I had wanted to leave her free in case anything happened to me. And I had—too free. I could still close my eyes and see her letter—

*. . . this is goodbye, Tom. You don't know the man. His name doesn't matter. But I love him and he loves me. I can't stand this waiting, waiting, waiting. I'm young. I want to live . . .*

That had been five years ago. She had wanted to live. Now she was in a drawer at the morgue. It had been all I could do not to tell Gibbs, "Of course I know her. Her

name is Margie Thorp. That is—it used to be. She's a kid from the old neighborhood. That's my ring she's still wearing. We were married just before I went overseas but she divorced me while I was still in the service and went off with some other guy. I don't know his name.

"I haven't seen her since until the night before last, when she gave me a buzz to come up to Room four hundred ten of the old Lexington hotel. And when I dropped in to see what was cooking I found her riding a Bobo-bush six miles in the sky and wanting to hold hands."

Sally turned in her sleep. I didn't want her hurt. I didn't intend she should be. And the story was a natural for the papers.

Unidentified murdered girl saved from Potter's Field by chance visit to the morgue former husband. Tom Karpis, former Air Force pilot, now a sergeant of detectives working out of Central Bureau, this afternoon identified the mysterious blonde in the morgue as his former wife.

There was no telling what they would print about Sally. It stood to reason the reporters and sob sisters would pounce on my broken marriage. What they didn't know they would invent.

On the other hand, if I didn't identify Margie someone else was bound to. I was a cop. I knew. It wasn't on any report that I had met her at the Lexington. But it would come out. Some bellboy or maid would talk and I'd gone on record as not knowing her. Some smart homicide boy would begin to wonder why. One thing would lead to another, Sally's jealousy would come out.

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The only logical conclusion would be that Margie had tried to crawl back in my life and to protect what I had I had patted her with a knife and dropped her in the river.

One thing was certain. As Joe Gibbs had pointed out the guy who killed her wasn't going to come forward and admit it.

I THOUGHT of my meeting with Margie. It had been screwball from the start. Some dame had called and said if I would meet her in Room 410 at the Lexington she would tip me to something important. Fogged from three weeks of looking for Schaller I had thought she was a stoolie about to sing. I hadn't even recognized the voice. But when I walked into 410 it was Margie.

Margie, smoking a muggle and torn between fear and a bunkyen to build a fire out of what had been ashes for years.

*"Sweetheart,"* she had called me.

And I had done what I had wanted to do for a long time—given her the back of my hand. "Don't sweetheart me," I had told her. "You spent a nickle to get me here. I'm here. Now what's the story?"

But she had clammed up after that. I could tell now that she had been frightened but at the time I had just thought that she was sore because I wasn't chump enough to let her crawl back in my lap after damn near wrecking my life.

The only other words that she had spoken were, "All right. If you feel that bad about it, Tom, let's skip it."

And that had been fine with me. I had turned on my heel and walked out, glad to

know she was out of my blood. Now she was dead. If I identified her, Sally was in for a bad time. If I didn't identify her and someone else did I was in for an even worse time. I couldn't prove I hadn't killed her. God knew I had wanted to a lot of times.

On impulse I called the morgue.

"No. No one has identified her, Sergeant Karpis," Gil Harvey the night man told me. "A Mrs. Cooper of forty-one-thirty-two West Evergreen gave us that Mrs. Tafano business again and Lieutenant Cannon chased out to see her but I heard him tell Gibbs when he came back he thought she was full of hop. Why? You got something on the dame?"

I evaded the question. "No. I just got to wondering."

Sally called from the bedroom as I was hanging up and asked if I would bring her a glass of milk. I sat on the bed as she drank it. "You do love me, don't you, Tom?" she asked.

I said, "Of course."

"And you never think of that awful Margie any more?"

I considered telling her the truth and couldn't.

Sally's eyes flashed dangerously. "Well, do you?"

I laughed at her. "Don't be silly. Margie never enters my mind unless you bring her up."

Satisfied she gave me the empty glass and lifted her lips to be kissed. "In that case, let's call it a day." She settled contentedly into her pillow. "I think Tom, Jr. is getting sleepy."

She went to sleep. I didn't. I was still

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awake when the first yellow finger of dawn rubbed some of the black from the window. I wished I hadn't gone to the morgue. Why, after wrecking it once, hadn't Margie stayed out of my life? I really didn't care who had killed her. She had probably had it coming.

Sally was right. Margie was a tramp. Still, somewhere out in the dawn, the man who had killed her was laughing. He thought he had committed the perfect murder. The hell of it was, unless I tagged him and fast, the chances were he had. What's more, it was even money it would be pinned on me . . .

MRS. COOPER was fat and red-haired and blowsy. She made it clear she was sorry she had opened her mouth. "Another cop, a lieutenant, was out here last night," she complained. "And if I'd known the cops were going to hound me I wouldn't have said a word. All I did say was I thought the girl looked like a Mrs. Tafano."

"You knew this Mrs. Tafano well?"

Mrs. Cooper was indignant. "I didn't know her at all. I only met her the once. That was out on the south side when my boy friend took me to the opening of the Silver Grill. What was that little tramp to me that I should get mixed up with a knife man?"

So saying she shut the door in my face.

The barman at the Silver Grill felt much the same way about it. "Yeah, I was working the night we opened," he admitted. "But that was two years ago. And if I got my nose dirty by sticking it

into the business of every little doll who's ever had a drink in here I'd have a knife in my back that long. No. Sorry, copper. I don't know a Mrs. Tafano. To me they're all Mable or Susie or Margie."

I said, "Let's talk about Margie then."

He shook his head. "Nix. I just used that as an illustration."

It could be he was telling the truth. I couldn't push him. I wasn't assigned to the case. I didn't dare ask to be assigned to it. Unless I succeeded in getting back to the guy who had killed her every question I asked was just so much more fuel for a smart D.A. to use to build the fire that would burn me. It was night when I finished combing the section.

As she lifted her lips to be kissed Sally wanted to know what I had been doing all day.

"Oh, looking for a guy," I told her.

The second and third days were much the same. I had to sandwich in my questions between my regular assignments. I covered the Near North Side, the West Side Paulina Street hot spots and the Loop. The story was always the same. I had only the one vague clue. Seemingly no one had ever heard the name Tafano.

Margie still lay in her drawer at the morgue but time was running out on me. Margie's parents were dead. So was the aunt who had raised her. But Pop had summed it up. Sooner or later one of the stream of men and women filing through the morgue would recognize her. She was too pretty not to be remembered.

Sooner or later someone would say, "Why, yes. That's Margie Tafano or Mrs.

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Jones or Mrs. Brown. And before that she was married to a G.I. A boy by the name of Karpis, I believe. Yes, that's right—Tom Karpis.”

And I'd said I didn't know her.

It was on the morning of the fourth day, in a combination bar and cabaret not far from the old neighborhood, that I got my first break.

“Tafano.” The barman rolled the name on his tongue. “Yeah. I knew a Johnny Tafano. He was a skin beater with the band here about two, three, years ago. And as I recall he was shackled up with a classy little blonde. But I don't remember if her name was Margie or not.”

I showed him one of the pictures the tech squad had taken of Margie. He said it looked like the girl but refused to make a positive identification. He did describe Tafano as chunky and red-haired. “And he was hopped up most of the time,” he told me. “So help me, I think the guy lived on reefers!”

A girl in the office of the musician's union was more helpful. She confirmed that there was a drummer named Johnny Tafano. He was listed as a good man but unreliable. Two years before the local had advanced him five hundred dollars, since paid back, to take a narcotics cure.

I thanked her and joined the unemployed musicians blocking the doorway of the Woods Theater Building. The fourth lad I talked to knew Johnny Tafano well. He was, however, suspicious of my motives.

“Why don't you guys leave him alone?”

he demanded. “Johnny's been off the

stuff for two years. Ever since he took a cure.”

I said I wasn't interested in Tafano's narcotics habits. “All I want to know where he is now and if he is, or was, married to a blond girl named Margie.”

The musician was relieved. He said he didn't know where Johnny was but that he and his wife, Margie, had broken up right after he had taken the cure.

“She hooked up with a guy with more dough,” he told me. “I never saw such a doll. All the time talking about she wanted to live. And believe me, copper, she did.”

I asked if she had taken the cure with Tafano. He said he didn't think she had. Nor did he know the name of the sanitarium to which Tafano had gone although he believed it was in River Forest. “Why?” he demanded. “What's the beef with Margie?”

I said, “No beef. She's dead. She's the unidentified blonde in the morgue.”

He was shocked, “Jee! I'll go right over and identify her.”

AND that was that. The fat was in the fire. I had to move fast from here on in. I started at the Narcotics Bureau.

“In River Forest,” Jack Gold said. “The place you mean must be Mandell's. We've had an eye on his joint for some time but haven't been able to get a thing on him. He's a big good-looking guy. Likes to live fast and does. And if the reports we have on him are correct he's running a joint. You know, cures addicts with his left hand and makes new ones with his right.”

I asked Gold if Mandell was married.

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He grinned. "At least what passes for it. The last time I was out there to check his permits and his stock I got a squint at a nifty little blonde who was really a nice number." He looked at the pictures I showed him and shrugged. "I wouldn't say yes, I wouldn't say no. Could be. Why? You homicide boys trying to tie Mandell to the death of the little blond doll at the morgue?"

I lied to the effect that all I was doing was checking on the doll. I asked if he were willing to describe Mandell over the phone to Pop Hayes. Hayes had gone out for coffee but Gibbs was still in back of the screen and Gold described Mandell to him.

Gibbs was excited. "Yeah. That guy was here the first day we put her on show. He made an off-color crack about he bet she'd been a hot little number. Then he said he was looking for his sister."

I asked Gold if Doctor Mandell had a sister. He said there was no such relationship listed. I started to hang up and Gibbs asked me to hang on a moment. When he came back he was even more excited.

"Hey. What gives here?" he wanted to know. "A guy was just in—a musician, he says—and made a positive identification. He says the doll is a Mrs. Johnny Tafano."

I told him to tell Lieutenant Canon and hung up.

Gold watched me massage my right fist. "Easy now, Karpis," he warned me. "Don't go off half-cocked. You act to me like you have a personal interest in this case."

I wiped the cold sweat from the back

of my neck. "You should just know, brother.

Has this Doctor Mandell any weakness?"

"Only money and women." Gold grinned.

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The sanitarium was built of gray stone in the center of a wooded acre, in turn enclosed by a high stone wall well-frosted with broken glass. A rheumy-eyed gateman looked at me without approval.

"And just who do you want to see?"

I said, "Doctor Mandell." I picked a card a lawyer had given me from my wallet and handed it to him. "Tell the doctor I'm trying to locate a former patient of his, a Mrs. John Tafano. We're trying to close her estate."

The old man called the main building.

"Say, Doc,"—he consulted the card—"There's a Mr. John Veda of the law firm of Veda, Harris and Associates out here." I didn't like the way he leaned on the word. "He says he's trying to locate one of your former patients by the name of Mrs. John Tafano. Something about an estate." He listened a moment, then hung up. "The Doctor says he'll see you."

A big good-looking man, Mandell was in the doorway of his office. "Mr. Veda?"

It was like shaking hands with a cobra. "As your gateman told you," I opened, "I'm trying to locate a Mrs. John Tafano. Her musician husband died on the coast some months ago, leaving a small estate. And on checking with the local

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union I learned he was a patient of yours.”

“That is correct.”

I took the bait I'd drawn out of the bank from my pocket and spread the bills fanwise. A small matter of three thousand dollars. But we would like to settle the estate.”

He looked at the bills and licked his lips.

I put them back in my pocket. “Do you happen to know where Mrs. Tafano is now?”

I sat back and let him carry the ball. If he told me she was the blond doll in the morgue it could be he was clear and I was sunk. If he beat around the bush he was hooked. I knew he had seen Margie.

“Why, yes,” he said finally. “I do. And it pleases me very much, Mr. Veda, to be able to cooperate with you. But excuse me just a minute.”

He left me sitting on tacks. I couldn't stop him from leaving the room. I wasn't a cop in River Forest. I was just a guy with a gun in my pocket—a guy who could smell the seat of his pants burning.

HE WAS gone nearer ten minutes than one. When he came back he was smiling.

“This,” he began, “Is really a coincidence, Mr. Veda. You see, tiring of the sordid life she was leading with her husband, Mrs. Tafano stayed on here at the sanitarium as one of my assistants after she and her husband were cured of their habit. In fact she's here in the building now.”

It was a play I hadn't considered. I didn't know what to say.

“I'll call her in,” Mandell continued, “and you can talk to her yourself.” He spoke into the interoffice annunciator on his desk. “Miss Phillips, would you have Mrs. Tafano step in, please.”

The girl was young and blond and pretty—pretty as Margie had been the last time I had kissed her. Her legs were slim shafts of silk. She looked young and vital.

Only her eyes were wrong. They were as old as sin and swimming with the ‘bang’ she had just taken. “There was something you wanted, Doctor?” she played the game with Mandell.

Mandell nodded at me. “Yes. This is Mr. Veda, Margie. Mr. Veda is a lawyer. And brace yourself for a shock, my dear. It would seem that Johnny is dead and Mr. Veda has called about some money left to you.”

The girl's hand caught at her throat. “Oh! How sad.”

I gave them credit. They were good. Both of them should have been on the stage. I told the girl, “There's some three thousand dollars involved. But of course you realize I'll have to have more than your word that you are Mrs. Tafano.”

She said, “Of course. If you'll just come up to my room, Mr. Veda.”

I followed her upstairs, Mandell close on my heels. The room looked solid. It was. The bed was all in one piece and bolted to the wall. The window was small and barred. It looked more like a cell than a room. The girl who claimed she was Margie opened the drawer of a built-in dresser and brought out a bunch of letters tied with a faded ribbon. Even from across the room I recognized them as the letters



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I'd written Margie.

The blond handed them to me. "Would you consider these proof?"

Tied in with the letters was a newspaper clipping of my marriage to Sally. It looked tear-stained to me. And so did the letters. I felt like a dog. Margie had realized her mistake. But she hadn't whined. She had even kept the account of my marriage to another woman. But, having made her bed, she had slept in it. She had gone on 'living' until it killed her. She had only tried to see me once, probably to ask for help. And I had given her the back of my hand.

The girl who claimed to be Margie turned back to the dresser. "And if that isn't enough . . . " She turned again, this time with a gun in her hand. Her face was no longer pretty. "All right, copper. Reach. Just what kind of chumps do you think we are?"

Still smiling Mandell pointed another gun at me. "I'll take over from here, Ann. You get his gun and that money."

I stood with my hands in the air, making no protest, while the hyped-up blond tugged my .38 from its holster and the three grand in bait from my pocket. Then, for good measure, she took my wallet, opened it, and chirped. "Holy smoke. This guy is Tom Karpis. This is the hot shot hero Margie was married to before she divorced him for that skin beater."

Mandell's eyes turned ugly. "I see. It was you who spotted her in the morgue, eh, Karpis? It was you who stirred up all this stink." He snorted his disgust. "And you were chump enough to think I'd fall

for your lawyer gag. As if lawyers carry the estates they are settling in cash."

I pointed out, "The money was enough to tip your hand."

Mandell nodded. "That's right. And I'm using it to scam. The game is played out here anyway. The Federal men are watching every move I make, cutting off my contacts.

"And if that wasn't enough, after all I did for her, after all the money I spent on her, Margie suddenly had to turn virtuous and start for Gold's office with enough evidence against me to send me up for life. All because I started to pay attention to Ann."

I could have bawled, for Margie. It was the old story of the restless butterfly. She'd left me for Tafano. She'd left Tafano for Mandell. And then, old in her middle twenties, when a new face had come along she'd found herself in the discard.

I said, "'Then you did kill her.'"

MANDELL showed me his white teeth. "Don't be ridiculous, Karpis. A knife isn't a doctor's weapon. If I'd wanted to be rid of Margie, filled with the stuff as she was, all I would have had to do was slip her an overdose."

I said, "And prove that someone with access to narcotics killed her. That would have been a dumb play on your part."

Mandell shrugged. "Regardless. If it hadn't been for you she'd just have been another nameless little doll in the morgue. How come you got into the act?"

"Because I didn't want to burn," I told him. "You see, Margie met me a few nights ago. And her being my ex-wife and

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me being married to a very jealous woman, a smart D.A. could have made it look bad.”

“I wish I'd known that,” he said simply. “I mean that Margie had met you. I could have pointed up that angle of the caper.” He shrugged. “But that’s all in the past.” Without looking away from me he told the girl, “Get out of that uniform and into some street clothes, Ann. We’re leaving—as of now.”

The blonde unbuttoned the uniform and let it drop to the floor. All she had under it was a lace bra and a pair of sheer scanties. “Take a good look, copper,” she jeered. “You might as well die happy.”

She crossed the room toward a closet. I turned to face Mandell. He was tensing himself to pull the trigger. “That’s it,” he said tight-lipped. “Rush me, Karpis. It will make it that much easier.”

“What’s the matter?” I asked him. “It isn’t as easy, is it, to shoot a man as it is to stick a knife into a drug-muddled girl.” Then, flinging myself sideways, I pulled the hideaway gun in my belt.

Mandell cursed and fired. A slug tugged at the lobe of my ear. Another smacked into the wall. Then I put three where he lived.

His voice was that of a petulant child. “You tricked me, Karpis,” he complained. “You intended to kill me all the time.” He sat down as if suddenly tired, one arm behind him bracing his body. Then the brace gave away and he lay flat on his back.

The blonde began to whimper.

I recovered my money from Mandell. I needed it as starter to send Bettina and

maybe a Tom, Jr., to college. Then, putting the letters I had written Margie in my pocket, I took out my roll again. Peeling five hundred off it I put it in one of the dresser drawers underneath some letters Tafano had written her. It would keep Margie out of potter’s field. I owed the kid that much. From here on in we were square.

I still had a lot of explaining to do but I had a hunch, once they heard the story, both Lieutenant Canon and Gold would be satisfied. Canon would square me with the River Forest cops. More, both men would understand and keep my personal connection with Margie out of the formal inquiry. Sally need never know. Mandell was dead and couldn’t talk. Ann wouldn’t dare to.

She had got over some of her fright. There was a speculative look in her eyes. Like all pretty women in a jam she thought she could buy her way out. “Look, Sergeant Karpis,” she began. “If you’ll let me go—”

“Get some clothes on, sister,” I told her.

“A lot of clothes. Because in a very few minutes a lot of guys, city and federal and local, are going to be swarming all over this joint and you wouldn’t want to be pinched for indecency, would you?”

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It was midnight when the brass kissed me goodnight and let me go. Bettina had been asleep for hours. Sally was in bed but awake and worried about me. “I was afraid something had happened to you,” she

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sniveled.

I wiped her tears with my handkerchief. "Nix now, honey. You know what you promised when we were married. You knew you were marrying a cop."

She said, "I know. What was it? Some important case?"

I said, "Not very. I was just looking for a guy."

I felt fine. I felt completely free and

honest for the first time since we had been married. Maybe Sally was right. Maybe I had still been a little in love with Margie. Now Margie was gone—forever.

I smoothed Sally's pillow and turned out the lamp. "You get some sleep," I told her. "Remember you're sleeping for two."

She giggled in the dark, then yawned sleepily. "About that fellow you were looking for, Tom. Did you find him?"

"Yeah. I found him," I told her.