

CRIME ANTHOLOGY

with stories from...

Steve Hockensmith

Dave Zeltserman

Hilary Davidson

Robert Lopresti


Kevin Quigley

Marilyn Todd

Warren Moore

L. C. Tyler

and more...



DEATH OF A BAD NEIGHBOR

edited by Jack Calverley

Revenge is Criminal

Death of a Bad Neighbour: *Revenge is Criminal*

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Death of a Bad Neighbour: *Revenge is Criminal*

An Anthology
of CRIME AND MYSTERY STORIES

Edited by Jack Calverley

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The Authors

Hilary Davidson

HILARY DAVIDSON is the bestselling author of seven crime novels. Her work includes the standalones *Her Last Breath* and *Blood Always Tells*, the Shadows of New York series (*One Small Sacrifice* and *Don't Look Down*), and the Lily Moore series (*The Damage Done*, *The Next One to Fall*, and *Evil in All Its Disguises*). Her fiction has won two Anthony Awards and a Derringer Award. Her short stories have appeared in *Thuglit*, *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, *Beat to a Pulp*, *Mystery Tribune*, and other dark places. Before turning to a life of crime-writing, Hilary was a journalist and the author of 18 nonfiction books. Originally from Toronto, she has lived in New York City since October 2001. Visit her online at: www.hilarydavidson.com Instagram: @hilarydavidsonbooks Twitter: @hilarydavidson.

Eve Elliot

EVE ELLIOT is a voice actress, fiction writer and essayist who has recently discovered the thrill of writing crime fiction. Her short stories and creative non-fiction have been published in ten anthologies and journals in Europe and North America, and she recently wrote and produced her first radio play, *The Death of Dr. Davidson*, as a full cast, twelve-part audio series. She is also currently completing her second romance novel, releasing it one chapter at a time to her Patreon supporters. *One Spye After Another* is her first attempt at mixing humour and crime. She lives in Dublin, Ireland. Find out more at www.eveelliot.com.

Kay Hanifen

KAY HANIFEN was born on a Friday the 13th and lived in a haunted castle for three months, so naturally, she has a taste for the strange and macabre. She is a graduate of Emerson College with a BFA in Creative Writing. Her articles have appeared in *Ghouls Magazine*, *Screen Rant*, *The Borgen Project*, and *Leatherneck* magazine; and her short stories have appeared in *Strangely Funny VIII*, *Crunchy With Ketchup*, *Midnight From Beyond the Stars*, *Dark Shadows: The Gay Nineties*, *Wicked Newsletters*, *Fearful Fun*, *Death of a Bad Neighbor*, *Enchanted Entrapments*, and *Slice of Paradise*. When she's not consuming pop culture with the voraciousness of a vampire at a 24-hour blood bank, you can usually find her with her two black cats or on Twitter @TheUnicornComi1.

Wendy Harrison

WENDY HARRISON's fascination with mystery began with Nancy Drew and continued with real-life experiences as a prosecutor in Florida. Now retired, she spends her time solving crimes of her own creation as a published mystery short story writer. Her publications include stories in the anthologies *Peace, Love & Crime: Crime Fiction Inspired by Songs of the '60s*, *Autumn Noir*, *Holiday Hijinks*, *Crimeucopia: Tales from the Back Porch* and *The Big Fang*, as well as the upcoming *More Groovy Gumshoes*. She shares her home with Brooks, her first-reader husband, and with a rescued Shepherd mix dog and a calico cat who bark and purr respectively as she writes.

Steve Hockensmith

STEVE HOCKENSMITH's first novel, *Holmes on the Range*, was a finalist for the Edgar, Shamus, Anthony and Dilys awards. He's gone on to write five sequels (so far) as well as the New York Times bestseller *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies: Dawn of the Dreadfuls* and the tarot-themed mystery *The White Magic Five and Dime*. He's also authored a number of books and graphic novels for children, including the Edgar finalist *Nick and Tesla's Super-Cyborg Gadget Glove*. A widely published writer of short stories, he's appeared in *Ellery Queen* and *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* more than 30 times. You can learn more about him and his writing at stevehockensmith.com.

Robert Lopresti

ROBERT LOPRESTI is the author of more than eighty short stories, some of which have won the Black Orchid Novella Award, and the Derringer Award (three times), as well as being reprinted in *Best American Mystery Stories* and *Year's Best Dark Fantasy and Horror*. His latest novel, *Greenfellas*, is a comic caper about the Mafia trying to save the environment. He is a retired librarian, lives in the Pacific Northwest, and is the current president of the Short Mystery Fiction Society. He can be found online at: roblopresti.com.

Nick Manzolillo

NICK MANZOLILLO is the author of the Lovecraftian horror novel *Moon, Regardless*. His short fiction has appeared in over sixty publications, including: *Switchblade*, *TQR*, *Red Room Magazine*, *Grievous Angel*, and the *Tales To Terrify* podcast. He has an MFA in Creative and Professional Writing from Western Connecticut State University and currently lives in Rhode Island. You can find out more about him at nickmanzolillo.com.

Warren Moore

WARREN MOORE is Professor of English at Newberry College, in Newberry, South Carolina. His novel *Broken Glass Waltzes* was published in 2017 by Down&Out Books, and his short fiction has appeared in numerous anthologies and small publications. Moore blogs at profmondo.wordpress.com, and can be found on Twitter as [@profmondo](https://twitter.com/profmondo).

Eve Morton

EVE MORTON is an author, poet, academic, and educator living in Ontario, Canada. Her latest mystery/suspense story is *The Serenity Nearby* (Sapphire Publishing, 2022). She teaches university and college classes on media studies, academic writing, and genre literature, among other topics. Find more information, including more short stories and poetry on authormorton.wordpress.com.

Shiny Nyquist

SHINY NYQUIST lives on a narrowboat on the canal system in England ‘cruising the cut’ while working as a website designer, thus sharing vicariously in enterprises as diverse as a private academy, a portrait artist, and a sex shop, and then writing fiction as time allows, with a web presence here:

shinyquist.wordpress.com/

Kevin Quigley

KEVIN QUIGLEY grew up in suburbia and knows a thing or two about the protective nature of cat owners... and of bad neighbors. He is the author of the novels *I'm On Fire* and *Roller Disco Saturday Night*, as well as the short story collections *Damage & Dread* and *This Terrestrial Hell*. His stories have appeared in the Cemetery Dance anthologies *Halloween Carnival* and *Shivers*, and Lawrence Block's upcoming *Playing Games*.

Quigley is also known for his monographic work on Stephen King (*The Stephen King Illustrated Movie Trivia Book*, *Chart of Darkness*, *Stephen King Limited*), which has earned him expert status on the subject. His latest nonfiction book is a deep exploration into the Oregon folk-rock band Blitzen Trapper, and their seminal album, *Furr*. He lives in Boston, Massachusetts with his husband, Shawn, in a building that does not allow pets.

Marilyn Todd

MARILYN TODD is the award-winning author of twenty historical thrillers, three anthologies, and over a hundred short stories. A regular contributor to *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, she was also nominated for a *Private Eye* Writers of America Shamus Award. Her latest series features Britain's first crime-scene photographer—“which brilliantly evokes the darker side of Victorian London.” Born in London, Marilyn now lives with her husband in France, and when she isn't killing people, she enjoys cooking—which is pretty much the same thing. Catch her online here: www.marilyntodd.com.

F. D. Trenton

F. D. TRENTON has worked as a silicon chip tester and a fintech programmer, and has had articles published in **Computing** and **Computer Weekly**. F.D. lives in the northernmost outskirts of London, England, within earshot of numerous motorways, none of which are much use to even the most devoted cyclist.

L. C. Tyler

L. C. TYLER is a former chair of the Crime Writers Association and the author of two detective series: the Herring Mysteries (recently optioned for television) and a historical crime series featuring seventeenth century lawyer and spy, John Grey. He has twice won the Goldsboro Last Laugh Award for the best humorous crime novel of the year and has been shortlisted for the Edgar Allan Poe Awards and for the CWA Historical Dagger. He also writes short stories, for British and American anthologies, and was awarded the 2017 CWA Short Story Dagger. He has lived and worked all over the world, including postings to Hong Kong, Malaysia, Sudan and Denmark, but has more recently been based in London and West Sussex. He can be found online at lctyler99.wixsite.com/mysite on Twitter as @lencyler.

Dave Zeltserman

DAVE ZELTSERMAN is an award-winning writer whose crime and horror novels have been chosen by NPR, Washington Post, Booklist, WBUR, and American Library Association for best books of the year. His crime novel, **Small Crimes**, has been made into a Netflix film, and his novel **The Caretaker of Lorne Field** is currently in film development.

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Introduction

Jack Calverley

I AM TOLD that a criminal gang built the house I live in.

I'm talking wide-shouldered men wearing orange and white stripes who, as prisoners under supervision, poured the concrete into upright moulds—the house is neither brick built nor timber framed—and they hung rust-red tiles across the building at the front, and across the pitched roof, painting the rest of the house white, aside from the window frames and outside doors which, front and rear, they painted black. They equipped kitchen and bathroom, although their initial shrines to gushing water have long since been swapped out for whatever has, over the years, captured the fashion-conscious home-owner's eye (I inherited a peppermint green bathroom suite upstairs and a kitchen of black marble downstairs).

The man who told me this lives next door in a similar house. When he told me, it was in hushed tones, with his head bent.

His name is Bob.

Bob is all tortoise head and tortoise neck with a few wisps of lemon grass hair. And while he habitually wears a light shirt and blue jeans you can't help feeling it is a lightweight disguise for loose-fitting heavy-duty tweed.

It was Bob who told me that the previous occupants of my home were a couple who quarreled, split up, and divided the house between them. The wife moved upstairs; the husband took up residence on the ground floor. She used the front door; he the rear. She took up graphic design. He took to drinking, and to playing heavy metal music twenty-four hours a day. But, soon after they split up, he died in a motorcycle accident. He had been hammering down the Edgware Road at thirty-something miles an hour when a London black cab driver opened the cab door into the path of the bike...

Thus died a chronological neighbour of mine, he occupying the same house as me, but for a neighbouring period of time.

The house on the other side of mine, so Bob tells me, used to belong to a couple and their teenage daughter. The couple

split up after the husband fell into bed with a German teacher (she was German and a teacher; whether she taught German or geography or something entirely other, no one seems to know). The husband, having cleaved himself from his erstwhile loved ones with an emotional axe, was subsequently diagnosed with a rare incurable illness, told he had not long to live, and the NHS could do nothing for him (this was some years ago, you understand, and treatments move ever onward. As to what would happen today, who can say?). Anyhow, upon hearing the bad news, the German mistress whisked the husband off to Germany where some treatment was at least forthcoming.

Bob had me hooked up to this point, but he was unable to report a final outcome and I felt that, rather than tell me about the neighbours, he was trying to make a political point, a sour triumphalism—for or against the NHS or its funding, I couldn't say—but it dulled my interest.

The current occupant of that house on the mother-and-daughter side has recently extended the roof, turning the attic into an oversized brutalist bedroom without seeking planning permission and, according to Bob, you wouldn't believe how many locals have written to the council to complain about what amounts to a concrete block the size and shape of a shipping container being impaled upon a traditional red-tiled pitched roof.

The council, whose job it is to do something, has done nothing.

Then there is the house across the road, built by regular folk from bricks the colour of burned toast, and there are the people that people it: a middle-aged upholsterer [grey-clad, string-vested, shambling, and bald]; a midnight DJ who announces every last return home in booming bass [dreadlocked and besmoked, in green and yellow and red, who chatters a million words a second like your best-of-breed racetrack pundit]; and there's some mother's cast-out son, who is never seen to work, but wherever he goes he trails the garden brazier smell of home-grown marijuana, and is probably growing it, converting it to cash, and calling that a good living [pale as death, mind you, flimsy as rice-paper, and with panda eyes].

But if the council can't be moved to visit a noisy, muddy building site to view an architectural abomination in the

making, for certain: an over-stretched Met Police is even less likely to visit a minor cultivator of a drug that many would claim merely stupefies and pacifies its users and, thereby, the primary offender—the perp I hear you correcting me—remains untroubled by Justice.

Nonetheless I have to say (because there are other stories too), mostly, Bob has me hooked by these glimpses into local life; he has me convinced by these little yarns. Every time we meet at the gate, or in the street, or when swapping each other's wrongly delivered mail—yes, I admit, he has me mesmerized as he keeps me up to date with all the comings and goings, all the histories that give rise to the human landscape, and what happens when I am away, at work, or travelling, and cannot see for myself.

You see when I'm around, nothing much ever happens; I must absent myself from the neighbourhood for the least mischief to occur.

As if I were some kind of *hi-viz* officer of the law.

Of course, I don't know how much of anything dear old Bob says is true. But it seems that all that is needed for his stories to gain some traction is for them to persist in the minds of his audience.

Had he not had me hooked, I could hardly report these histories to you now, could I? And yet how much of what he says is fiction? How much is deliberately shaped—designed, even, using a skill he has honed over many years—to make it plausible, and memorable? To make it true.

Well, allow me to go one or two steps further:

Would it surprise you to learn that Bob's late son was a Motörhead fan and motorcycle enthusiast? Or that the unfaithful and once gravely-ill husband was an upholsterer? How intertwined might this local world turn out to be?

However:

Have I succeeded in persuading you that tortoise-headed Bob actually exists?

You see, for sure, I must denounce all of this as fiction. I have to. Heaven forfend that anyone I have ever known thinks I am writing about them, and takes offence—feels demeaned, or diminished in any way, especially in the eyes of the public, to suffer reputational damage, or an intrusion of privacy.

Anyone so demeaned might sue.

So, no. No! No! No! ***None of the above is true!***

Necessarily, everything I have written here is make-believe. And the people who people this make-believe are make-believe too, for the sole purpose of my fictitious examples.

So also, this must be true for all that follows in this anthology.

More so since the theme is bad neighbours. Those people whom we could all happily do without. For whom money trumps decency. Arrogance and personal convenience trump consideration or good manners—never mind generosity of spirit—and as for morality, who he? Not these neighbours, not the rental landlord who ignores all complaints when the noise and mess his tenants make, at all hours of the day and night, is the bane of someone else's life; not the entitled daughters of the rich and famous who press their good fortune into service to manipulate due process; not the twisted freeholder who turns every marginally legal trick in the book to extort fees from leaseholders who cannot then sell because they would have to reveal just how bad their freeholder is (the leaseholder-freeholder thing being a feature of the UK).

And if you think for one moment these bad neighbours care, you are as unhinged as they are. Making them care is the problem. Decent people cannot conceive how bad people can be bad, while bad people cannot conceive why decent people bother being decent. And beware, because if ever you vent your frustration, these neighbours are the experts in the complaints procedures and they are ***the*** great manipulators and you will find yourself unwittingly painted as the irredeemably guilty party. Bleak indeed.

So...The stories in this anthology are mostly about some kind of comeuppance, and of course in real life the scum-sucking pond-life never get their comeuppance (if they did they would not be scum-sucking pond-life, rather, they would be the criminals, duly convicted and behind bars, set to learn housebuilding, or some other socially useful skill).

So is there the least modicum of truth in anything I have set out in these pages?

No! No! No! None of this is true!

What's more: the contributing authors all assure me that the stories they have submitted and which follow this introduction are pure fiction and to the best of their knowledge and belief their characters bear no resemblance to any real life characters, nor their story events to any real life events.

Read on dear reader, read on, for good fiction carries with it the emotional impact of truth while brushing with fact in nothing more than imaginary caresses, soft touches of mind's-eye colour, and evocative almost-scents.

I kid you not.

Jack Calverley
March 2022

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Lambs and Wolves

Robert Lopresti

THE FIRST TIME he saw the bald guy in the woods, Garmo figured: *This is it. They found me.*

Of course, he wouldn't have been surprised to spot hunters with shotguns out there, hoping to blast coyotes or rabbits or whatever the hicks in these parts liked to kill. But this guy was nothing like that.

Baldy was ex-military, or wanted to look like it. Six-foot-plus, muscles rippling under black clothes. No visible weapons, but plenty of room for a gun under his turtleneck.

Garmo had been doing the dishes—washing his coffee cup, really—when he looked out the kitchen window and spied the man prowling through the woods just beyond his backyard.

He stepped away from the window, too far back for Baldy to see him. The whole emergency plan vanished from his head in a heartbeat.

Calm down, dammit.

Should he call Meisengill? Wasn't that the first step?

His right hand flexed involuntarily, grasping for a gun that wasn't there. A gun would bust the deal, get him sent to a prison where he would be whacked as surely as if Baldy—

Where was the bastard now?

There. He had slipped past Garmo's little house and was peeking over the fence at the colonial home next door.

Garmo's shoulders sagged in relief.

I'll be damned. He's just stalking Kathy.

MEISENGILL DIDN'T BUY it. When Garmo told him about the bald guy at their next scheduled meeting—in the back room of a sub shop half an hour outside of town—the deputy marshal was furious.

"I don't believe this. You saw a possible shooter doing reconnaissance of your house and you didn't think that was

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worth giving me a little ring-a-ding? What sort of death wish do you have, anyway?"

"Relax," said Garmo. He bit into his lunch, the so-called Sicilian sub, which was a sad thing. What he wouldn't give for a meatball hoagie, but nobody within a hundred miles of this place knew Italian food from Spanish fly.

"It turns out the guy was just your average perv, spying on the chick who lives next door."

"And that's another thing," said Meisengill, red in the face. "You're supposed to report changes in your environment. This woman moved in almost a month ago and you just mention her today?"

Garmo shrugged. "If she was gonna kill me she'd have done it by now."

"Oh, brilliant." The marshal's eyes narrowed. "You didn't want us looking too close because you had plans for her, right? Are you keeping it in your pants?"

Garmo snorted. "I'm just trying to stay alive out here in freaking no-man's land."

THE FACT WAS that when he first saw the blond woman carrying bags of groceries in from her car his first thought had not been about security rules.

He reached her driveway just as she stepped out of her house, ready for another load.

"You must be the new neighbor," he said. "I'm Jeff Clancy."

That name bugged him. He didn't look like an Irishman but the experts at the Marshal Service said anything Italian was too obvious.

The blonde smiled back and held out her hand. "Kathy Whitehill. Pleased to meet you."

"Can I help with your bags?"

"That would be great. I just moved in so I have to get, you know, all the stuff you'd expect a kitchen to have, spices and herbs, and..."

All Garmo expected from a kitchen was a fridge to store leftover take-out and a microwave to reheat it, but he nodded and started hoisting sacks.

Lambs and Wolves

"I rented the place furnished," Kathy had said. "Which is my way of saying that ugly lamp isn't my fault. And, oh lord, the wallpaper."

"Mine is furnished too," said Garmo. "There's a picture in the living room that looks like someone tried to paint a horse through a beer bottle."

She laughed. "Have a seat and watch me unpack. What brought you to your furnished home, Jeff?"

It was no pain watching her. She was maybe thirty, a few years older than Garmo. Clearly she worked out, but was not a body-builder. Garmo approved; he hated muscle-bound women. She wore tight jeans and a t-shirt that said HOOSIERS. An Indiana thing, he supposed.

"Got laid off from my job in Rhode Island," he said, "and wanted a change. My cousin runs an auto parts store here in town and needed some help."

Actually Tom Parnell was no relative, and what he had really needed was a deal with the IRS to pave over some creative accounting he had done, so he had agreed to hire Jeff Clancy, no questions asked.

"What brings you to our thriving metropolis?"

Kathy laughed again. She had finished putting beef and vegetables in the fridge and was now storing things in the pantry.

"I'm an advance scout. Ed, that's my husband, is a construction manager. Do you know what that is? When a skyscraper's going up somebody has to run the office. Make sure the portapotties and girders show up on time, not to mention the workers. That's my Ed."

"Sounds interesting," Garmo lied.

"He loves it. The problem is that every few years he builds himself right out of a job. He's finishing one right now in Bloomington, and he'll be starting another one here next month."

"I can't believe they're raising a skyscraper here in hicksville."

"That would stand out like the proverbial sore thumb, wouldn't it? No, they're building a new hospital over in the county seat."

Lambs and Wolves

She turned around and smiled at him. "Okay, the rest of the stuff can wait. Want a beer?"

"That would be nice."

"Coming up. So I got here, rented this place for a couple of months and now I'm looking for a home we can live in long-term. By the time he gets here I'll have a house all fixed up and our stuff in it."

"Doesn't he want to see the place first?"

"Ed likes surprises. Besides, I know what he likes."

"You must get lonely when he's in the next state."

"Oh, we make up for it when he's here." The way she smiled told Garmo there was no point in putting the moves on her. Meisengill would approve.

"And what do you do when you aren't scouting the jungles of Indiana?" he asked.

"Technical writer," she said with a shrug. "I write those boring manuals nobody wants to read. And here I thought I would be the next Margaret Atwood."

MEISENGILL WAS IGNORING his own sandwich, jotting notes. "If you spot the bald guy again, try to get a picture of him. We'll see if he's got a record."

"Should I warn the girl about him?"

The deputy looked startled. "I told you, damn it. Stay away from her! You're trouble on the hoof and you won't make things any better by getting involved. Get it?"

Garmo shook his head. "I don't understand you, Deputy."

"Why? What isn't clear?"

"Oh, I understand what you're saying. It's **you** I don't get." Garmo waved a hand. "Me, I don't much care for my job at the auto parts store, but I don't resent it like you do yours. You're always mad. You've got a good job with benefits and a pension. So what's your problem?"

Meisengill went cherry red.

"You want to know the truth, **Jeff**?" He gave the new name a mocking tone. "I love part of my job and I hate the other part. It depends on whether I'm dealing with lambs or wolves."

Garmo frowned. "What does that mean?"

The deputy sighed. "Let's take a hypothetical, okay? Say there's this woman, a schoolteacher with a husband and two kids. Never had so much as a parking ticket. One night she's walking her dog and she hears a fight going on across the street."

Garmo put down his sandwich.

"She sees this guy take a gun and shoot some other clown in the head three times. Bang bang bang."

Garmo's throat had gone dry. He sipped soda.

For once Meisengill seemed to be enjoying himself. "The teacher managed to keep her dog quiet and get back to her apartment house without being seen by Johnny Gunslinger. And being a good citizen who believes in the American system of justice, this little lamb called the cops and reported what she saw."

Garmo had heard a dog *yip* that night but he had been too busy concentrating on Fabrizzi, bleeding on the pavement, to worry about it. One in a long line of mistakes.

"So," said Meisengill, with mock cheerfulness. "This poor woman and her whole family wound up in the witness protection program, having to uproot themselves, change their names, their jobs, abandon friends and family, all because of that trigger-happy fool."

All because she was a snitch.

"But it gets better!" said the deputy. "Because our idiot friend put three bullets in the vic's skull and didn't even kill him. Quite a marksman, huh?"

Fabrizzi had found Garmo in bed with his wife and chased him with Anna's peashooter of a gun. Garmo wrestled it away from him, but how could he know those little bullets wouldn't finish the job?

"Now," said Meisengill, "you'd think the victim would have been happy to testify against the man who banged his wife and almost killed him, and that might have left the schoolteacher off the hook. But no, the near-sighted shooter's daddy was a mob boss, and the vic was so terrified he wouldn't say a word."

Garmo nodded. His father had paid Fabrizzi's medical bills and given the man and his wife a pile of dough to leave town. A much better deal than they would have gotten if he had stuck around to testify.

“So, wrapping things up,” said Meisengill, “the idiot with the gun was facing a long prison sentence, and, since there is no honor whatsoever among thieves, he decided to cooperate with the feds.”

It was the hardest decision Garmo had ever made, even though his father had insisted on it. “I don’t want to die knowing you’re in prison,” he had said. “Talk. You don’t owe those jackals in our family anything. Hell, they won’t let you run my business anyway.”

“What I can’t understand,” Meisengill went on, “and what I can never forgive, is that the geniuses at the Justice Department agreed that you didn’t have to testify against your father. You sent a bunch of small fry to prison but that bastard Don Garmo is still strolling around free as a goddamned bird.”

“My father isn’t strolling anywhere. He’s in a bed dying.”

The deputy snorted. “I’ll believe that when I piss on his tombstone. I know plenty of Mafia kingpins who had certificates from a dozen M.D.s that they were on death’s doorstep, and most of them were still kicking when their prosecutors died of old age.”

Garmo realized he was squashing his sandwich between tightening fingers. He put it down again and wiped his hands. “I’m sorry my father isn’t dying fast enough to suit you.”

Meisengill snorted. “Oh, have I hurt your tender little feelings? Gimme a break. If I’m going to get sentimental it’s about all the people who died young because of your old man.”

He drank his orange juice. “But I digress, don’t I? You were asking about my job satisfaction. I like my work fine when I’m protecting the lambs, like the teacher and her family. And I have no idea where they are, so don’t you dare ask.

“What gives me acid indigestion is when I’m taking care of wolves like you. Believe me, I would be happy to leave you to the hit men your so-called friends have set on your tail. But that would discourage future turncoats from seeing the light. So here I am babysitting a tattletale jerk who couldn’t even kill the man he was cuckolding. Lucky me.”

Garmo released a breath. “Lucky you.”

Meisengill shrugged. “It’s a living. You have anything else to report except your new lust object and the bald guy chasing her?”

Lambs and Wolves

"No. Listen, could I write a letter to my father?"

"Jesus." The marshal straightened up. "You really do have a death wish. Anything you send will be read by half of a dozen of your dearest enemies before it reaches the old man's sick bed. If it ever does reach him."

"I'm not that important."

"Damn right. You're a bug on the windshield. But all the paisans you put in jail, and their loving relatives outside, they all want revenge."

Garmo shrugged. This was not news. "There's some stuff I want to get off my chest before he passes. Is that so wrong?"

Meisengill sighed. "Tell you what. Go ahead and write your letter. Not a word about where you are or how you spend your days. Give it to me next time we meet and if the people upstairs approve it I'll have it typed up and sent along to the old bastard."

"A typed copy?"

"The original might give somebody a hint as to where you are." He shrugged. "Ink. Paper. Pollen. That ain't gonna happen."

Garmo smiled. "Thanks. I appreciate it."

Meisengill raised a bony finger. "But only if you keep your nose clean, Jeff Clancy. No speeding tickets. And don't miss a day's work."

"Got it."

"And stay away from your sexy neighbor. Chasing a married woman got you into this mess."

"WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM today?" asked Parnell. The owner of the auto parts store was a beefy man, although Garmo never saw him eating a thing. He usually had a stick of nicotine gum in his mouth, chewing automatically when he wasn't complaining. Today he was desperate to close the store early to get to a basketball game. A **high school** game. Apparently that passed for entertainment out here.

"I had to ask you three times to get those plugs. Are you on vacation?" Then he grinned nervously.

Parnell's attitude to Garmo was a study in mixed feelings. Obviously he resented having "Jeff Clancy" forced on him by

the feds. And he was the kind of a man certain to pick on any sucker unlucky enough to work for him.

But after giving Garmo a dressing-down he would invariably remember that this was a guy with a past, probably a bloody one. Suddenly he would be all smiles, as if the insults had just been a joke.

“Sorry,” said Garmo. “Got a lot on my mind today. Sick relative.”

Parnell frowned.

Garmo figured he was thinking: ***This man's not supposed to be in touch with any relatives. Is he lying or breaking the rules?***

No doubt the boss would soon be calling Meisengill in a panic, worrying that Jeff Clancy's mysterious past was about to show up in the store with an AK-47.

Well, let 'em whine. For once Garmo was telling the truth. He was worried about his father. And besides, he had been following the rules like a freaking boy scout.

As he manhandled cartons into place in the back room of the store he thought about what he wanted to say to his old man.

There was no way he could apologize for being such a screw-up. But at least he could say thanks for all his father had done for him. Maybe reminisce about the good times when he was growing up, when his mom was still alive.

Before he really understood what his father did for a living. Before he was eager to join up.

“Clancy! Get your ass up here now!”

He sighed.

GARMO SAW HIS neighbor twice in the next few weeks. The first time it happened while he was mowing the lawn. That was another chore he had never had to do in the city, but at least he understood it. This was not true about some of the other yard work.

When he had arrived in town there was a twenty pound sack of top soil near the front door. What were you supposed to do with that? Next to it were half a dozen black steel stakes, each seven feet long. It was clear you were supposed to put the pointed end in the ground and hang something from the hook

on the other end. He had no idea what. So they still leaned against the wall, mocking the city boy.

He was dragging the lawn mower over to trim the sidewalk edges when Kathy popped out of her house, pretty as a picture in halter top and shorts. She waved as she headed to her car.

“House hunting!” she said.

“Good luck.” But he didn’t mean it. When she disappeared this dreary edge of suburbia was going to be even more depressing.

THE NEXT TIME he saw her was downtown. It was his lunch break and he was strolling to a burger joint—what passed for pizza out here was too tragic to consider—when he saw Kathy on the other side of the street, coming out of the post office with a big envelope in her hand.

Garmo was about to call her name when, damned if he didn’t see the bald guy again. He was dressed in jeans and a gray sweater this time, and he was at the far end of the block. He was absolutely staring at Kathy.

“Hey!” yelled Garmo, and stepped into the street.

A horn blasted and he heard the screech of brakes. A white SUV slammed to a stop a foot in front of him.

The driver shouted as Garmo ran past.

Kathy was wide-eyed. “Jeff, be careful! You could have gotten killed!”

The bald guy was gone. “Damn it.”

“Jeff? What’s wrong?”

“You have any stalkers? Ex-boyfriends following you?”

“What? No!”

“I just saw a guy watching you, down by the drug store. A bald-headed man.”

“What makes you think he was watching me?”

“He was looking right at you.”

“So? He was looking down the street. That’s nothing to get run over about.”

“Yeah, but I saw him once before.”

Kathy frowned. “When was that?”

“A couple of days after you moved in. He was skulking around in the woods behind your yard.”

She stared at him for a moment. Then she smiled. "Skulking."

Garmo felt his face reddening. *She thinks I'm coming on to her.* "I mean it, Kathy. This is real."

"Then why didn't you tell me about it then?"

Good question. He couldn't explain that a U.S. deputy marshal had told him to stay away from her.

"I forgot about it until I saw him again."

She patted his arm. "That's very sweet of you, Jeff, but I can take care of myself."

"Look." Garmo felt helpless. "Watch out for bald men, okay? And lock your doors."

She laughed. "I watch out for all men, regardless of their hair style. Women have to." She walked away, hips twitching.

Garmo shook his head. Trying to be one of the good guys was a lot harder than he expected.

ANOTHER WEEK PASSED. Another week of shifting pallets and cartons for Parnell. Each day he came home, ate whatever crap food he'd picked up on the way. Then he worked on the letter to his father. When he ran out of things to write he'd crack a beer and watch TV.

The next day he did it all again.

At night he would dream of his old life, planning robberies. Sticking it to rivals. Outsmarting cops and prosecutors.

It all seemed unreal now. Or was this the fantasy life, out where graffiti on a cemetery wall was a major crime wave?

HE FINALLY DECIDED the letter was finished. He had said all he could, if not all he wanted to. He wrote out a clean copy, no scratch-outs or changes. He wasn't sure why he bothered, since the feds would type it up before giving it to the old man. But it seemed important to do the thing right.

The next morning was his day off. He slept late and then called Meisengill.

The deputy sounded strange, like he'd been caught swallowing coffee. "Clancy. I've been meaning to phone you."

“Well, I saved you the trouble. I’ve got that letter ready for my father. I don’t want—”

“Stop.” The marshal sighed. “I’m sorry. Your father died yesterday. It’ll be in the news this morning.”

Garmo said nothing. He could smell the summer flowers out in his yard. Sickly sweet, he decided.

“I want to go to the funeral.”

Meisengill was all business again. “Not possible. You know the rules.”

“Make it possible, damn it! It’s all I can do for him.”

“You go anywhere near that graveyard and you’ll be their next customer. You know there’s a contract out on you and the hit men will be hanging around like hunters in deer season. I’m sorry it happened this way, but—”

Through the window Garmo saw Kathy coming out of her house. She turned to lock the door and—

The bald guy, dressed in black again, burst out of the bushes. He hit her on the head with a blackjack and Kathy collapsed, tumbling backwards into his arms.

Garmo dropped the phone. He ran to his front door, silently cursing his lack of a gun.

Outside, he snatched up one of the long metal garden stakes that was leaning against the wall, still waiting for him to find a place for them.

Then he ran next door.

The bald guy had dragged Kathy into the house and was trying to push the door shut.

Garmo hit the door with his shoulder and thrust it forward, almost into Baldy’s face.

The stalker jumped back. He reached into his jacket, obviously going for a holster, and Garmo grabbed the garden stake with both hands and shoved.

Baldy stumbled over Kathy’s body and tumbled back onto the carpet.