

# The Man on the Ledge

BY JOEL SAYRE

Joel Sayre has been a connoisseur of the more lively aspects of American life for a number of years. His first book, *Rackety-Rax* (1932), was a fantasy about a mob of racketeers who went into college football and really made it pay. Critics hailed it as one of the most effective satires on the age of jazz and gin. Mr. Sayre was a reporter for City Editor Stanley Walker on the New York *Herald Tribune*, later wrote movie scripts in Hollywood, and worked in the radio department of Time, Inc. During the war he was a correspondent for the *New Yorker*. His other books are *Hizzoner the Mayor*, *Persian Gulf Command*, and *The House Without a Roof*.

## ☼ 1.

IT WAS HOT and cloudy in New York City on the morning of Thursday, July 26, 1938. Patrolman Charles V. Glasco, of the Traffic Division's Summons Squad, began his tour of duty at 8 A.M., his duty being to serve summonses on persons who had been guilty of traffic violations. An amiable, rather rotund man of better than average height, with sharp brown eyes and black hair almost gone on top, Glasco, aged thirty-five, had been in the Police Department for fourteen years and was highly regarded by the other members of Traffic C, the unit he was attached to, as a teller of dialect stories. Glasco was very proud of his Irish ancestry and very sensitive to his surname's being mistaken for a non-Irish one. Whenever this mistake was made in his presence, he would do a brief slow burn and then produce his membership card in the Ancient Order of Hibernians, which he always carried for just such emergencies. "If the name was Costello, nobody'd ever question it for a second," he used to remark somewhat bitterly on these occasions.

Having begun his tour of duty at 8 A.M., Glasco was due to finish it

at 4 P.M. When he had left his home at Woodhaven in the Borough of Queens, his wife, Margaret, had told him that for dinner that night there would be liver and bacon, one of his favorite dishes. Glasco spent the morning serving summonses around the West Side of Manhattan. He was not feeling too spry: his sacroiliac had been paining him lately, and his back was strapped with adhesive tape. On making his routine telephone check-in with his office at noon from a street corner call-box, he was ordered to report at once to Sergeant Murphy at Fifth Avenue and Fifty-fifth Street and lend a hand in a big traffic tie-up there.

As Glasco approached Fifth Avenue and Fifty-fifth Street, which is in a district devoted mostly to luxury shops and expensive hotels, he thought that there must be a fire somewhere in the immediate neighborhood, for, in addition to staring crowds gathered on the sidewalks, he saw two hook-and-ladder trucks, a rescue truck from the police Emergency Division, three police radio cars, and an ambulance. The traffic tie-up at the intersection was indeed big. Glasco soon found Sergeant Murphy, who was standing on the south steps of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church at the intersection's northwest corner, and reported to him. The sergeant was mopping his brow. "Take a look up there," he said, pointing at the Hotel Gotham, directly across Fifty-fifth Street.

The Gotham's roof rises 202 feet above the sidewalk. On a façade ledge four floors below the roof, Glasco saw the hatless, coatless figure of a man standing outside an open window. He was leaning with his back against the edge of an oval architectural ornament of floral design, about a yard wide and almost shoulder high, that protruded from the building's wall. The man was facing westward, toward Sixth Avenue. Immediately to the east of this ornament, in the direction of Fifth Avenue, was another open window, and suddenly through it appeared the blond head of a woman, who lay with her right side resting on the sill and beckoned to the standing man with her left arm. At her appearance the man whirled eastward in her direction, then crouched swiftly, holding on to the architectural ornament with one hand and raising his other arm to his head, as though to ward off a blow.

"That'd be his sister, I guess," the sergeant said. "He's been on that ledge about half an hour now, come out around eleven-forty. I wish the

hell they'd get him in before he louses up all the traffic on Manhattan Island."

"Well, if they don't jump the first hour, they never jump," Glasco said. "At least that's what I've heard many a time from Emergency Division guys that spent years working on ledge-walkers. Why don't they grab him?"

"Can't get at him. He threatens to jump every time a cop comes near that window."

"I'd get at him," Glasco said. The sergeant lowered his gaze and stared. "I'd stop being a cop for a while. I'd get at him."

The sergeant thought it over. "Well, maybe you would, at that. You always was a pretty good actor. It's worth trying anyhow. Go on up to room 1714 and tell the lieutenant I sent you. See if you can get that poor loopy in off of that ledge, Charlie. They tell me he's only a kid. Con him in off of that ledge, and maybe we can have a little peace down here."

## 2.

THE MAN on the ledge was John William Warde, aged twenty-six, who lived with his parents at Southampton, Long Island. His father, John A. Warde, was an employee of the American Railway Express Company in Southampton, which has a population of about four thousand and is best known as a summer resort for the rich. Young Warde had been graduated from high school just in time for the Great Depression. He was a quiet, slender, good-looking boy with thick, curly, black hair. He was fond of sports, music, and poetry. In high school he had had the reputation of being moody. For some years he was a clerk in a local bank, where he was known as an intelligent worker though a bit peculiar at times. In July, 1937, John tried to kill himself with a knife. After he had recovered from his wounds, he was committed to the State Hospital at Central Islip, Long Island, for observation. The following November he was released from the institution with a note on his discharge papers, "The patient's manic-depressive psychosis seems to have arrested itself."

Mr. and Mrs. Patrick A. Valentine, Jr., a kind-hearted couple in their

mid-thirties who had spent many summers in Southampton and were well acquainted with the Warde family, employed John after his discharge from the hospital as a companion to their two small children and as a sort of casual chauffeur and handy man. It was their hope that a job in pleasant surroundings and under friendly conditions might help him conquer his depression and recover his self-confidence. The Valentines were people of wealth. Mr. Valentine's father, Patrick A. Valentine, Sr., came to this country from Scotland as a young man, went to work for the Chicago packing firm of Armour and Company, rose to be its financial director, and married the widow of Philip D. Armour, Jr. In 1910 he paid a steel baron half a million dollars for a mansion off Fifth Avenue and moved his family to New York. He died in 1916. Patrick Valentine, Jr., married a first cousin of his, Miss May Valentine. Their summer place at Southampton was called Valmay. Mr. Valentine was head of the Clara Laughlin Travel Service, named after the indefatigable Midwestern maiden lady whose series of guidebooks, their titles beginning with the words, "So You're Going to—" (Paris, London, Germany, etc.), had become almost standard equipment for American tourists.

Eight days before he appeared on the ledge at the Gotham, John Warde had driven to a bridge at Hampton Bays, near Southampton, in his father's car, parked it, walked to the middle of the bridge, and stood there gazing down at the water. His manner and actions had aroused the suspicions of a bridge tender, who chased him off the bridge, took the license number of his car as he drove away, and informed the police. The police found John at his home, but as no actual suicide attempt had been made, no official action was taken beyond his being given a "talking to." His family was, of course, alarmed and told the Valentines. Thinking that a change of scene might help, the Valentines took John on a week-end trip to Chicago. John's twenty-two-year-old married sister, Katherine, of whom he was fond, accompanied them. In Chicago John swam in Lake Michigan, saw the Cubs, his favorite ball club, and attended a symphony concert in Grant Park Stadium. Although the Valentines and Katherine strove to make things as pleasant for him as they could, their efforts didn't seem to cheer him up much.

They returned to New York on Tuesday morning at about ten o'clock and went to the suite at the Gotham which the Valentines had been using as their city residence for about a year. Mrs. Valentine phoned Southampton and inquired about the children. Mr. Valentine departed for his office at the travel agency, which was situated a few blocks from the hotel, leaving John with the two women, who chatted about the heat and the things that each had to do that day. Katherine mentioned that she was going to phone a doctor and make an appointment for John to see him. "No!" John said. "All right, all right, keep your hair on," Katherine replied and changed the subject. John took off his coat, folded it carefully, and laid it over the back of an armchair; then he tucked the ends of his blue necktie inside his shirt. He was wearing neatly pressed gray flannel trousers, and his black shoes had a high shine on them. John really did look nice, Katherine reflected; he had always been fastidious about his appearance, poor darling. Several menus were slid under the door. The women examined them and commenced discussing what to have for lunch. Room service was rung, food orders were given.

There were no hard words, there was no quarrel. John merely said, "I'm going out the window," in a quiet voice and did so before Katherine or Mrs. Valentine could say or do anything about it. Katherine rushed to the phone and began screaming at the switchboard operator. Mrs. Valentine ran to the window, then turned and cried, "No, no, he's here, Katherine, here on the ledge. He's all right." Katherine went to the window and looked at her brother, then she looked down. The ledge on which he was standing is eighteen inches wide and 160 feet above the street. She looked at John again, started to speak to him, and fainted.

### 3.

THE MAN on the ledge was noticed almost immediately by pedestrians, who began forming in groups on the sidewalks and staring up at him. A policeman directing traffic at Fifth Avenue and Fifty-fifth Street left his post and hurried into the hotel. When he leaned out of the

window of 1714 he shouted at John, "Hey, you, come in here! What are you doing out there, anyway?" John was backed away from the window, to the east of it, leaning against the architectural ornament. The balls of his feet were poised on the edge of the ledge, like those of a swimmer about to plunge into a pool. "Don't you come near me or I'll jump," he said to the policeman. There was a look in his eyes that made the policeman withdraw from the window at once and telephone Headquarters and the Fire Department. Soon the hook-and-ladder trucks, the rescue squad, the ambulance, and sixty men under an inspector arrived.

The Police and Fire Departments have many techniques for seizing a person threatening suicide, most of them based on his being contacted before he sees his rescuers; but the position John had taken made this impossible. He was standing too far out on the ledge to be touched, much less seized, from the window of 1714; and the window of 1716, directly to the east, was still farther away. Lieutenant William Klotzbach, a lariat and rope expert from the Emergency Division, went to the window directly above John on the eighteenth floor, but another protruding ledge there made the lassoing of him out of the question. The cornice of the hotel roof hung out so far that lowering a bosun's chair from it four floors could not have been accomplished without John's seeing the chair long before it got to him. He was too high to be reached by the fire ladders; the canvas life-net, with the red circle painted in its center, which the fireman had spread on the sidewalk ready to snatch up, would not hold a body falling more than six or seven stories. Had there been a building of approximately equal height opposite the Gotham, perhaps some kind of rescue contrivance might have been rigged from it. But there was only the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church with its comparatively low roof.

There was just one course for the police to follow, and that was to wait John out. At least once and probably twice before within the past year this boy had tried to end his life; now he could snap the thread of it at will by merely shifting his balance an inch or two. Also, it seemed clear that a policeman in uniform meant "keeper" to him, an enemy come to take him to some institution; and he instantly recognized as police several men in plainclothes who attempted to coax him in. John

would have to be persuaded to save himself—by someone who already had his trust or could win it, or by his own thinking, or by his weariness.

Again and again Katherine and Mrs. Valentine went to the window to plead with him. Here is one conversation that took place:

"John, it's Katherine talking to you, it's your sister who loves you. Come in, darling. We all love you, John, you definitely know that. Come in and have a drink, John, darling. You have so much to live for, so many good times ahead of you. Oh, please, please, please, John, come on in. Johnny!"

"I want to be left alone," John replied quietly and politely but decidedly. "I've got to work things out for myself. I've got problems to think about."

"Oh, John, darling, everybody's got problems. You can work yours out somewhere else. We've always been so close, Johnny, haven't we? Just like brother and sister, I mean just like a couple of brothers, haven't we? You're the best brother in the world."

"No, I'm not. You think I haven't got character."

"Oh, darling, darling, I never said you didn't have character. You have character. You've got more character than I ever thought of having. Johnny, please, please, please, come back to us."

"I want to be left alone here awhile."

Katherine was overcome with weeping, and Mrs. Valentine took her place.

"Come on in, John. Forget all about everything that's happened. Please be nice and come in."

"Where's my sister? Where's Katherine?"

"Katherine's asking for you, John. Come in, dear, please do. Come along in and have a nice lunch and forget everything."

"She wants to send me away. Back to that asylum."

"No, she doesn't, John, I swear she doesn't. Nobody in the world wants to do you any harm. I promise that nothing will happen to you, if you'll just come in."

"I've got to think things out for myself."

Once he said, "I can't get over that fence." Mrs. Valentine thought that by "fence" he meant the architectural ornament which separated them.

"If you're frightened about crossing that fence, John, we'll get someone to help you. I'll have him here in no time."

"No, thank you," he said. "I'd like to be left alone for a while, please."

Summoned from his office, Mr. Valentine went to the window.

"Hello, there, John. Say, I've got a proposition to make to you. We have a nice lunch here. Come on in and help us eat it, and then you and I'll go to the ball game. The Cubs are playing here today, those Cubs of yours."

"Who are they playing?"

"The Dodgers."

"I wouldn't care to see the Dodgers," John said.

The police phoned John's father at Southampton, but Mr. Warde was on his vacation, touring Vermont in his car. Mrs. Warde didn't know what part of Vermont he might be in or near. She herself was confined to her bed with an illness and couldn't come to New York. The police asked her if she had any ideas on how her son might be induced to come in off the ledge, but she had none. The Vermont state police were asked to find Mr. Warde and have him get in touch with the Gotham at once. John asked for a glass of water, but refused to allow it to be handed to him, insisting that it be left on the ledge and nobody should be near either window while he drank it. When he stooped to pick up the filled tumbler, women screamed in the crowds below, and people who had started into the hotel entered on the run.

#### 4.

BEFORE REPORTING to his superiors on the seventeenth floor, Patrolman Glasco stopped in the lobby to borrow a coat from the huskiest bellboy on duty; when he appeared at the window of 1714 he was wearing it unbuttoned because it would not quite button across the stomach and was somewhat tight under the arms. He had, of course, previously removed his cap, shield, pistol with holster, and cartridge belt. Glasco decided not to sit on the sill during his first appearance lest John should be suspicious of his police trousers, which didn't match the bellboy's coat, and he was also worried about the blue chambray shirt he had on;

under summer regulations the uniformed force had laid blouses aside. Would this boy recognize a police shirt? Glasco hoped not.

"Hello, John," he said easily.

"Who are you?" The suspicion in John's eyes bored into him. Glasco crossed himself mentally.

"I'm a new bellhop here at the Gotham, John. Matter of fact, I just got the job this morning. Listen, John, I don't want to butt in on what's strictly your own business, but I'd like to explain you my angle on this situation. John, I got a wife and three kids. Before the hotel took me on this morning, we'd all been on relief since I can't hardly remember when we wasn't. You ever been on relief, John?"

There was no answer, but the suspicion had gone out of John's eyes and his face had softened.

"Well, it's really tough, John, and I wouldn't kid you. Oh, I suppose if a man was single, it wouldn't be so bad, and the relief people mean well and do the best they can; but when you got a wife and three kids, boy, I'm telling you. Well, John, I'm just giving you my angle on this situation. Okay, you're out there on that ledge, and it's strictly your own business, but suppose something bad should happen to you? You know what it'd do? It'd besmirch the hotel, that's what it'd do. John, a hotel gets besmirched, its business gets lousy. Business gets lousy, the hotel starts laying off people. And who do they lay off first? The ones they took on last. Who did they take on last? Yours truly they took on last. So if anything should happen to you out there, John, it's back on relief for me and the wife and the three kids. John, I can't tell you how much I need this job, how much five people need it."

"Gosh, I wouldn't want you to have to go back on relief," John said. "Could I please have another drink of water?"

"You sure could," Glasco said, picking up the empty tumbler on the ledge and withdrawing into the room. He put the tumbler down and ripped off the bellboy's coat. "He's thirsty," he told the lieutenant from the Emergency Division. "Rope me up. This time I'll lay my prat on the sill and get as close to him as I can. When he takes the glass, I'll grab him by the wrist and then you can reel me in."

The lieutenant tied the slip noose securely around Glasco's right ankle. The rope ran under the bed and out the door into the hall, where

eight men from the Emergency Division were holding on to it. They were all large men: the Emergency Division invariably wins the tug-of-war at the annual Police Athletic League games.

"If he falls or jumps after you get hold of him, keep hanging on," the lieutenant said. "You won't drop more than five feet."

Glasco gave him a cop's look, then filled the tumbler from a pitcher of ice water and went to the window. This time he sat on the sill. John backed away against the architectural ornament until there were several feet between himself and Glasco. His insteps were again resting on the edge of the ledge. He was as taut as a cat arching its back.

"Easy, now, take it easy," Glasco said, keeping his eyes on John's and thrusting the tumbler toward him. "Here it is, and it's good and cold, too."

But instead of taking it, John inched farther away. His eyes were once more filled with suspicion.

"No, I won't drink it unless you have a drink of it first."

Glasco grinned. "Why, John, you don't think I'd slip you a Mickey, do you?" He drank several mouthfuls from the tumbler. There was a long silence. "See, John, it's just plain water like you asked for. Here." He thrust the glass toward John, but not very far, hoping that in reaching for it John would come close enough to be seized. John stood his ground.

"Give it to me with your left hand," he said.

There was nothing for Glasco to do but to obey. John stayed glued against the architectural ornament, reached his right arm forward, and carefully seized the rim of the tumbler by squeezing his index and middle fingers together. Glasco noticed that his nails had been bitten to the quick. While he drank, his eyes never left Glasco. When he finished, he stooped and slid the tumbler along the ledge back to him. There were screams from below. John stood erect on the edge of the ledge. Slowly, slowly his body rocked forward on the balls of his feet and he stared down at the crowd. There was even more screaming. Glasco had a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach, and bit his lip to keep from shouting.

"Look at those morons," John said. Then slowly he rocked back on the balls of his feet. Glasco began breathing again.

"Like some more water, John?"

"No, thank you, not now."

"Care for a smoke?" Glasco shook an opened pack of cigarettes until one cigarette stuck up above the others.

"Why, yes, thank you, I would. Will you hold them in your left hand, please?"

Again not permitting Glasco to get close enough to grab him, he extracted the upstanding cigarette from the pack, lit it from a book of matches he had in his pocket, and smoked hungrily. Then he looked at the cigarette. "I see you're a Lucky smoker. I smoke Philip Morrises. I've got some in my coat pocket in the room. No reason I should be smoking your cigarettes."

"Think nothing of it."

A silence.

"Why should you be kind to me? You never set eyes on me before."

"It's like I already told you, John, we're both tied up in this thing together. The way I got it figured, as long as you're in trouble out there, so are my wife and kids. Besides, well, maybe this'll sound fresh from a bellboy, but you look regular to me, you look like the type of man I'd like to have for a friend. Do you think we could be friends, John?"

John swallowed. "Of course we could," he said. Glasco leaned far out of the window and stretched his right arm forward to shake hands. John's eyes focused back to cunning. With the tip of his right little finger he touched the palm of Glasco's hand for the fraction of a second and then immediately withdrew the finger from reach. Glasco laughed.

"You don't trust me much, do you, John? Well, listen, John, I trust you, and that not only goes for me but the wife and kids, too. We're trusting you not to let anything bad happen to you or to us."

There was another silence. The suspicion swirled out of John's eyes.

"I can't get over that fence," he said slowly. "I've got a momentous decision to make. This thing has got to be thought out."

"Sure, I appreciate that, John. Maybe I can help you."

"Thanks, but I have to work it out alone."

Glasco felt the rope around his ankle being jerked.

"Well, whatever you work out, John, I want you to promise me not to let anything bad happen to you."

"I'll be working it out."

"That's fine, John. I'll be back in ten minutes. Just don't forget that we're all in there rooting for you."

## 5.

IN FRONT of the hotel, Fifty-fifth Street had now been cleared of everyone except members of the Police and Fire Departments and the press. Newsreel cameramen were setting up their tripods; photographers from the daily papers and the wire services were lying on their backs on the sidewalk by the church, aiming up at John with their "Big Berthas"—cameras with lenses having a focal length of twenty-eight inches or greater, the kind used to cover mass-attended sporting events. The Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church had curtly refused the use of its steeple for picture purposes; many photographers were working from rooftops and the upper windows of high office buildings, some as much as three hundred feet away. At 711 Fifth Avenue, half a block to the northeast of the hotel, the Television Section of the National Broadcasting Company was televising John. In the same building, Dave Driscoll, of the Special Features Section of the Mutual Broadcasting System, began putting John—or rather a breathless description of his plight—on the air. Hawkers circulated among the crowds in the streets and peddled cheap opera glasses so that John's fellow citizens might see him better. Passengers craned and goggled at John from the busses that crawled along Fifth Avenue. As though the crucial game of a World Series were being played, people all over Greater New York gathered about parked taxicabs equipped with radios. Switchboards at the West Forty-seventh and East Fifty-first Street precinct station houses were flooded with calls from persons with advice to give.

At ringside, so to speak, on the northeast corner of Fifth Avenue and Fifty-fifth Street, a cluster of John's co-mortals discussed his dilemma.

"It's a guy tryna settle a family scrap" . . . "Yeh, his wife trettana leavum" . . . "I hoid she did leavum awreddy" . . . "Fellow told me it's a broker attempting to get money out of his relatives" . . . "That's what I was told, except that he's an auditor wanted for ab-

sconding" . . . "Five'll gitcha eight he don't jump" . . . "Oh, it's probably just some advertising stunt, a publicity gag for the hotel" . . . "Lemme have those glasses a sec, Louise" . . . "*Geez, willya look-atum settin' down!*"

With nobody to talk to, John had seated himself on the ledge and was dangling one foot over the edge.

"Hold Fern a little higher, Daddy. See the funny man sitting way up there, dear? Oh, you aren't even looking at the right building. Look. Where Mamma's pointing. There" . . . "My God, Louise, the way he's got his head turned now, he's a dead ringer for Tyrone Power. Take the glasses quick" . . . "Five'll gitcha ten he don't jump" . . .

## 6.

GLASCO'S ANKLE had been tugged for a conference with his superiors. Present also was Dr. Jacques C. Presner, the house physician at the near-by Hotel Dorset, who had been summoned by the Gotham because its own house physician happened to be out of town that day. Dr. Presner was a French-Canadian by birth and a graduate of McGill University, a small, dark, neat man with tortoise-shell spectacles. He was not a psychiatrist, but every hotel physician has opportunities for observing the human mind and the strange things it sometimes does in some hotel guests.

"That kid out there is plenty smart, very foxy," Glasco told the conference. "The way things are now, you can't possibly get near enough to him to grab a belt or a sleeve or a trouser cuff, not speaking about an arm or a leg or a hand. I tried a couple of fast ones on him, but he saw through them in a flash. He does go, though, for that business about me being a bellhop with a wife and three kids. It has him worried. I got confidence I can talk him in, all right, only it'll take some time."

"Maybe if we could get one of those things they use in groceries to take cans and stuff down off the high shelves," a voice said. "Snap that on his ankle and, bing, you got him."

"Or how about you catch hold of him with a pair of ice tongs?" another suggested. "You whip them into something like a leg or some-

wheres, and right away his mind gets off whatever's bothering him upstairs and goes right down to where the pain is. Be a cinch to sew him up later, wouldn't it, Doc?"

But before Dr. Presner could answer, a third voice spoke up. "Neither of those things make any sense. If Glasco went out there carrying ice tongs or a grocery grabber, that kid might take off. You're forgetting that all he's got to do is give the least little twitch and he's away. No, sir, this thing is strictly a kid-glove proposition. It can't be licked by anything but patience. You got to tire him out. Glasco, get as much of that drinking water in him as you can; pretty soon he should be having to go to the bathroom and maybe he'll be wanting to come in. Keep right on being nice to him like you been doing. Get him talking about himself. You started out fine making friends with him, so stay with it. Will you take a look at him now, Doc?"

Glasco slipped the noose off his leg and went out into the hall. It was becoming crowded. He could hear the clatter of a typewriter, telephones ringing, and somebody saying, "Gimme the city desk." Across the way loud, excited German male voices boomed from behind a door slightly open. Glasco knew a little German and could catch a word or two.

*"Absolut phantastisch!" . . . "Ja, aber vollkommen meschugge!" . . . "Ganz ausgeschlossen!"*

His eight anchor men from the Emergency Division were leaning against the walls.

"How goes it, Charlie?"

"Well, it's slow, but I think we'll make it okay. What's with his sister?"

"Lying down in there. She ain't in too good shape."

"Listen, Charlie, all I ask is you get him in by four. I got a very important date then or thereabouts."

"You think I'm dawdling? I got a date myself to eat some liver and bacon."

"Say, Charlie, does that kid out there go for dames?"

"How should I know? We haven't got around to that yet. Why?"

"Oh, nothing. I was just thinking."

Glasco smoked a couple of cigarettes and chatted until a sergeant

stuck his head out of 1714 and hailed him. He went inside at once and shut the door. Dr. Presner had just come back from the window.

"He's asking for you," he told Glasco. "'Where's that bellboy, where's that bellboy?' was the last thing he said to me. We had a nice talk. I tried to impress on him that everybody in here is his friend. He wasn't hostile at all, but courteous throughout. I think he'd like to come in, on the one hand, but on the other he's afraid of the humiliation and possible punishment he'd have to face if he did come in after causing all this hullabaloo. It strikes me, though, that he's also getting quite a kick out of causing it, of being for once the monarch of all he surveys, you might say. I get a feeling of power drive there. Did he teeter on the edge and look down below while you were talking to him?"

"My God, yes," Glasco said, "and it scared the hell out of me."

"He has remarkable control of his equilibrium. And here's another thing. I've read quite a lot about the subconscious mind, but this is the first time I've ever had a definite sense of watching it in operation. You see it whenever you put something up to him and he starts thinking it over. It's in the way his face and hands and his limbs behave when the thinking is going on. You can almost hear one part of his mind tell him, 'You're a brave boy, John, you're wonderful. All these people admire you for standing New York on its ear. That man who just talked to you is your admirer and friend.' And while this is going on, there's what might be called a bodily nod. His head's nodding slightly and the rest of his body seems to be telling you, 'Yes, I know you're there. Give me time. What you just said is getting my most favorable consideration.' Then the bodily nod will stop while the other part of his mind seems to say, 'Watch out! Don't do anything rash. There may be danger ahead. Don't trust this man.' This part of his mind will finally dominate, and suddenly he'll shake his head and say out loud, 'Nope, I can't do it. Sorry.' I'd say his will power is by no means weak at this time, and he has control over his faculties."

"Any ideas on what we can do, Doc?"

"I think that our plan of attack ought to be to influence his mental attitude in the right direction. Glasco here is absolutely our best bet. Let him talk with him as long as he can, and whenever he gets tired, I'll spell him."

Glasco went back to the window.

"You're late," John said, looking at his wrist watch. "You said you'd be back in ten minutes, and it's more than fifteen. Nearly sixteen."

They talked for almost an hour and a half. They discussed picnics and which was better, a day picnic or a night picnic. John thought that night picnics were more colorful and romantic, but Glasco pointed out that by day the bugs weren't so bad, poison ivy was easier to dodge, children did not tread or sit on food as frequently, and added attractions like fat men's races and ball games between the marrieds and the singles could be held. This led naturally to a discussion of baseball. John declared that he didn't think the Brooklyn club would finish in the first division, and again he refused an invitation to attend the Cubs-Dodgers game. From there the talk turned to what sports John liked to indulge in himself. The first two mentioned were ping-pong, which Glasco had seen but never played, and badminton, which he had never heard of and at first confused with backgammon. Swimming, however, was John's favorite sport. He loved to take a long swim and then lie on the beach covered with sun-tan oil.

"Gee, that must be a great life, John. It shows in that streamlined build of yours. Do you take exercises regular besides?"

"Oh, sure, and I work with dumbbells, too. Listen, when I come in there, I'll take you out to my house and show you the swellest pair of dumbbells you ever saw."

Glasco stared at him and his heart pounded. He strove to keep the elation out of his voice.

"Well, let's get going then," he said casually.

"What do you mean?"

"Let's go see those dumbbells of yours. Matter of fact, for a long time now I've been wanting to get rid of some of this lard I'm carrying, and probably working with dumbbells is exactly what I need. If I like yours, I'll get me a pair of them and you can coach me what to do to develop a decent build. Come on, John, you got me all hopped up. Let's grab a train before that commuters' rush starts."

Until then, Glasco had not seen what Dr. Presner called "the bodily nod," but now he saw it.

"Not for a while yet," John said at last.

"When, then?"

"I'll let you know."

But Glasco was not discouraged. He was convinced that the jam had begun finally to break in the right direction. During this long conversation, John had drunk quite a few glasses of water, each of which Glasco had been forced to drink from first and then to deliver with his left hand. In the end it was Glasco and not John who went to the bathroom. Dr. Presner replaced him at the window.

As the afternoon wore on, the crowds below swelled, and Chief Inspector Alexander C. Anderson, now at the hotel supervising the case, kept sending for more police until he had three hundred on hand. Deputy Mayor Henry H. Curran arrived to see if he could be of assistance, as did Supreme Court Justice John E. McGeehan. Among other arrivals at the Gotham that afternoon were Miss Evelyn MacDonnell, "the Angel of the Bowery," from the Beacon Relief Mission; an individual dressed in white who described himself simply as "an army man" and offered to rescue John by jujitsu; a woman who insisted on kneeling in the lobby and praying because she was a faith healer with scientifically worked-out slogans; and a Miss Diane Gregal, who had prevented the suicide of Maurice Wast, broker, aged sixty-five, the previous December by coaxing him in off a ledge at the Pennsylvania Hotel. Miss Gregal informed the press that an unidentified male voice had summoned her by telephone. So many volunteers and persons claiming to possess special skills were swarming into the hotel that the police set up a check-point at the entrance, with the Gotham's register available, and admitted only bona-fide guests and those who could prove that they had legitimate business inside. Meanwhile the Gotham's flawlessly dressed manager had been striding through the building, doing his best to co-operate, and wringing his hands.

Dr. Presner's wife and his sister, who was in town on a visit from Montreal, were strolling down Fifth Avenue when they were stopped by the throngs at Fifty-fifth Street. They stared in the direction everybody else was staring. The doctor's sister screamed slightly. "Isn't that Jacques up there hanging out of that window?" she said. "Yes," said Mrs. Presner. As the neighboring *aficionados* could give them no coherent explanation for the unusual situation of their husband and

brother, the two women struggled to the hotel, but were refused permission to enter. A little later, in the home of a friend who had invited them to tea, everything was made clear by the radio blow-by-blow account of the event, which millions were now listening to all over the Western Hemisphere.

Sitting on the sill of 1714, Dr. Presner could hear booming through the hotel's open windows the voices of announcers describing John's actions, and his own, as they took place. He reported this, and the police made the thoughtless guests close their windows or shut off their sets. Countless suburban mothers, who had been drinking in the broadcasts all afternoon, phoned sons and daughters working in the midtown section to be sure to stop on their way home for a look at the spectacle on Fifty-fifth Street. (When quitting time came, many firms with offices affording good views of the Gotham's façade were unable to get their employees to leave.) That night in his news broadcast, Gabriel Heatter outdid himself. Altogether it was a great day for those principles of electrical phenomena first given to the world by that eminent physicist, Heinrich Rudolph Hertz.

One person who tuned in late was Mrs. Charles V. Glasco. She had been totally occupied all day with housework at her home out in Queens. Around a quarter to six her telephone rang. It was Augie Schmidt, the neighborhood butcher and a friend of the family.

"Well, Maggie, with your old man out on that ledge, I guess you'll be keeping that liver and bacon on the back of the stove this evening."

"Oh, dear," Mrs. Glasco said resignedly, "what is it with him now?"

"You didn't hear yet? Ho, ho, ho! Turn your radio on."

## 7.

SINCE BREAKFAST John had been subsisting solely on Lucky Strikes and water. Toward the end of the afternoon he asked for coffee and was given a cup of it, black. Having submitted it to the Glasco test for noxious drugs, he ordered cream and sugar. "More sugar," he demanded, handing the coffee back to Glasco after tasting it. The strategy of filling John up with liquids had so far worked only on Glasco. Nor did John appear at all wearied after standing in one spot for hours

under conditions of tension which had long since affected the spectators on the streets below. Relieved at intervals by Dr. Presner, Glasco had conversed with John the whole afternoon on the friendliest possible terms, and by six o'clock he had extracted numerous half-promises from him that he would come inside. But as the daylight began to go, a change seemed to come over John.

For the first time he refused to give Glasco even a half-promise.

"No," he said abruptly.

"No? Oh, now look, fella, what kind of talk is that? This is your pal the bellhop here, the guy with the wife and kids that'll go back on relief if you don't co-operate. You already told me a dozen times you'd take me out to your house and show me those dumbbells of yours, don't you remember? Don't you, John?"

No answer.

"Did I do or say anything to make you sore? John, if I did I'm sorry and I apologize. Is there anything you want, John? Anything I can do for you? Just name it and you can have it."

There was a silence, and then John said, "I want to talk to my sister."

"John, your sister's in bed with a terrible sick headache. She's taken this thing very hard and she's in bad shape. We better not bother her right now, John."

"I want to talk to Katherine," John said. Glasco could not dissuade him from his wish.

The police had set up a field telephone system to speed communication between their key elements stationed in various parts of the hotel, and to relieve the Gotham's swamped switchboard. One line of the network extended across Fifty-fifth Street to a sergeant standing on the steps of the church. His job was to keep his superiors inside the hotel informed of John's movements. A small cordon had to be thrown about this sergeant to protect him from zealots who squirmed through the police lines and pressed advice upon him. There was, of course, an installation in room 1714, and also one in 1716. Glasco brought a telephone to the window, rang Katherine in the next room, got her, and then started to pass the telephone to John. John shook his head. Glasco switched the instrument from his right to his left hand and gave it to him. John talked in such a low voice that Glasco could not

hear what he said, but from the way John was frowning when he lowered the telephone from his face, he inferred that the conversation hadn't been satisfactory to either participant. It had not been. In room 1716 Katherine put the telephone down and wept hysterically. Mrs. Valentine, who had been looking after her, picked it up. She spoke very gently.

"The children need you, darling. We all need you, so why don't you come in? We'll play ping-pong, we'll go swimming together. Come on, darling, take one little step here, one little step there, show them you can do it. We want you, Johnny, we need you. . . . Oh, Johnny, what do you mean, you can't come in? If you'll just come in, there'll be nothing."

Out on the ledge Glasco heard John say, "I'd be ashamed now, with all those people down there." He lowered the telephone from his face. Glasco pushed the phone cradle along the ledge. When John put the phone on it, perhaps he would be able to seize him. But once more John was too cunning. He tossed the phone to Glasco. "You do it," he said. Glasco put the phone on its cradle, withdrew from the window, and found Dr. Presner.

"Something's happened to him, Doc. You better take a look."

Glasco opened the door to the corridor. The crush reminded him of the lobby of Madison Square Garden on the night of a big fight. He caught the eye of the anchor man who had had the very important date at four o'clock and was glared at with mock rage. Another anchor man was in deep conversation with a blond young woman. Above the babble in the hall he could hear snatches from the Germans still talking the case over. "*Es ist ja unerhört!*" . . . "*Absolut phantastisch!*" Glasco shut the door and went to a bed, sat down, and held his head in his hands. His head ached. His eyes smarted. From the shifting and stretching he had been doing all afternoon on the sill, his sacroiliac pained him. Dr. Presner appeared from behind the window curtains.

"He'll come in if he gets a document signed by the Police Commissioner promising that nothing will happen to him."

Glasco wearily rose from the bed.

Dr. Presner went into a huddle with Deputy Mayor Curran, the

Chief Inspector, other high brass from the Police and Fire Departments, and three more doctors—all psychiatrists—who had arrived. Two of them were from Bellevue Hospital, and the third, a Chicagoan, was a guest in the hotel. Glasco was about to part the curtains to mount the sill again when he was waylaid by the anchor man and the blond young woman from the hallway. The anchor man spoke in an undertone.

"Listen, Charlie, I wish you'd give this friend of mine here a chance at that kid out there. She worked with us before and knows her stuff. She's okay."

"Well—" Glasco said, shooting a doubtful glance toward the huddle.

"Aw, come awn, Charlie! What can you lose?"

"Well, all right, but—"

The blond young woman knifed between the curtains and got up on the sill. Glasco and the anchor man strained their ears.

"Hello. Remember me?"

"No. Who are you? Where are you from?"

"Baltimore. Remember?"

"No."

"Look, aren't you lonesome out there?"

A silence.

"I'm lonesome. Why don't you come in here?"

Another silence. Then John said, "I want to be loved in the right way."

"Break it up," Glasco said, parting the curtains.

## 8.

AT ONE POINT Glasco was given a tumbler of water containing one-half a milligram of benzedrine for John. The doctors thought it might "heighten his mood." Although one New York newspaper the next day mentioned "hypnotic tablets," and a weekly magazine later spoke of "coffee liberally doped," this half-milligram of benzedrine, scarcely enough to brighten the outlook of a be-bop drummer, was actually all

the pharmaceutical stimulant that John received. He did not receive even that much, scientifically speaking, for, as usual whenever liquid was offered him, he made Glasco drink part of it first. When an attempt was made to repeat the dosage, a cloudiness in the water, caused by an imperfectly dissolved tablet, so roused John's suspicions that he made Glasco drink it all. The benzedrine-laced water failed to "heighten the mood" of either drinker.

Representing the Police Department, Captain William O'Brien, of the West Forty-seventh Street station, went to the window and told John that the document of immunity he had demanded from the Police Commissioner was being prepared.

"But you don't really need it," Captain O'Brien said. "You can go to your friends in Scarsdale, or anywhere you want, without hindrance, if you'll only come in. You believe me, don't you? Don't I look honest to you?"

"No, you don't," John said.

The Reverend James McCarthy, summoned from St. Patrick's Cathedral near by, went to the window and did the best he could, but soon realized that he was not making progress.

"By the way, are you a Catholic?"

"No. I'm an Episcopalian," John said in a detached tone.

The police again called the Warde home in Southampton. Mr. Warde was still somewhere in Vermont and had not been heard from. Mrs. Warde consented to appeal to John over the telephone. When John heard who was calling, however, he refused to take the telephone from Glasco.

The sun went down at seven twenty-three that day, but long before then, searchlights set up by the police were playing against the Gotham's façade, and the photographers were shooting their flash bulbs. The crowds grew steadily after dark, and traffic in the entire vicinity became even more clogged than during the day. The heaviest concentrations of spectators were on Fifty-fifth Street west of the hotel clear to Sixth Avenue, and along Fifth Avenue on the northeast corners of Fifty-fifth, Fifty-sixth, Fifty-seventh, and Fifty-eighth Streets. On Sixth Avenue between Fifty-sixth and Fifty-seventh, spectators milled and jostled for positions on a patch of sidewalk about eight feet square;

somebody had discovered that from it, through a space between two buildings, John's tiny figure could be seen, picked out by the searchlights. An angry, sweating policeman tried to keep this patch of sidewalk clear, but as soon as he cleared it the spectators would swarm back. "Go on home and look after your own children," he kept shouting at the women, but they merely laughed at him. With so many thousands staring into the air, it was a productive evening for pickpockets.

Dr. Presner and the three psychiatrists took turns at the window. Once Dr. Presner heard a woman call from a near-by roof, "Don't do it, John. We all love you. Go on back in like a good boy now."

Glasco went to the window again. He had the key to the room in his hand.

"John, I'd like to make a deal with you. You been out there eight, nine, ten hours now and you're all dirty and tired and you must feel awful. Look at your nails; you've bitten them down to the elbow almost. Well, John, this room's been cleared, and here's the key: I'm leaving it right here on this ledge. For the next twenty minutes the room'll be absolutely yours alone. If you want to, you can come in and have a good wash and get that dirt off and feel better. Then, if you want to, you can go back on out there."

"I'll think it over," John said, and it was obvious that he was interested. His voice and manner had not been so friendly since he had offered to show Glasco his dumbbells. He looked at his wrist watch and then looked at Glasco without suspicion.

"All right, John, you think it over. If you get cleaned up, I believe you'll find you can think clearer. Here's the key on the sill. I'll open the curtains so you can see for yourself the room's empty. Be back in twenty minutes."

John nodded and looked at his wrist watch again. Glasco withdrew from the window, fixed the curtains, and hurried to the door leading to the hall.

"Okay, Johnny, take it away," he said, raising his voice. He went into the hall and slammed the door.

In the room, concealed behind a bureau, was the fastest man in the Emergency Division at snapping on a pair of handcuffs. There was another Emergency Division man in the bathroom.

"Twenty-minute break, fellas," Glasco called to the anchor men, who at once moved off to make phone calls. Glasco stood with his ear against the door of 1714, listening for any sound from within, keeping his hand on the knob. There were still many people wandering up and down the hall, but he paid no attention to them. His mind was inside the room.

"I want to talk to that boy," he heard a voice say. Glasco turned from the door and saw a gaunt man with blazing eyes. He wore a high stiff collar of a cut that had gone out of style years before. The man identified himself as a Protestant clergyman. "I can save that boy," he said. "He doesn't understand the fear of God, that's all. I will explain it to him and save him."

"Sorry, sir," Glasco said, "but I have orders from the Chief Inspector not to let anybody in the room just now. Maybe if you'd call back in half an hour and see the Chief Inspector personally."

The clergyman turned away impatiently and moved down the hall toward the Fifth Avenue end of the building. Glasco put his ear to the door again and glanced at his watch. Five minutes had passed.

Inside 1714 a short while later, the handcuff expert, peeking through a slit below the bureau mirror, was surprised to see a gaunt man wearing an old-fashioned stiff collar enter from 1716 by a connecting door, which the police had had unlocked, and close it carefully behind him. No sooner had he closed it than John's figure appeared outside the window, doubled over, his face down by his knees, his eyes staring into the room. John saw the gaunt man immediately. His head swung up and his body disappeared from view. It had all happened in a split second.

"Sweet jumping Christ!" Glasco heard the handcuff expert say in fury. He shoved the door open and rushed into the room. Both Emergency Division men were coming out of their hiding places. "Go look at him quick," the handcuff expert said. Glasco ran to the window. John was on the ledge, back in his old niche, holding on to the architectural ornament. Glasco exhaled with relief, but the look on John's face worried him.

"I'm awful sorry, John. That party got in by mistake. He sneaked

into the next room on me and came in here through the side door. So many people in that next room, they didn't notice him. I swear it won't happen again. Will you give it another try, please?"

John didn't answer. Glasco knew that he would never give it another try.

The clergyman was removed from the room, and Dr. Presner went to the window. Glasco was sitting on the bed holding his head in his hands when he became aware that the Chief Inspector was standing in front of him. He rose to his feet.

"You've done a good job, Glasco, but we'll all have to keep punching at this thing a while longer. We've sent to the Coast Guard for a cargo net that we'll anchor one edge of along the windows directly below these; then we'll jerk the other edge up quick to the floor above this one and pin him against the side of the building. At the same time we'll lower a couple of bosun's chairs from the eighteenth, too. But it'll take a while to get the net here and get it set up. So as soon as the Doc comes in, I want you to take over for another hour."

Dr. Presner came in from the window; Glasco tore open a fresh pack of Philip Morris cigarettes.

"He just told me he knows everyone's interested in his welfare," the doctor said, "and he's asking for that bellboy again."

Glasco mounted the sill, drew the curtains around him, and began to talk. He started all over, from the beginning. He talked about his bellboy's job and the hotels he had worked in and his hope of staying off relief. He talked about his wife and children. He talked about picnics and baseball and ping-pong and badminton, about swimming and lying on the beach in the sun getting tanned and the satisfaction there must be in achieving a fine build through dumbbell exercise. He passed John cigarettes with his left hand automatically now, without having to be told. John smoked and listened, never answering the questions Glasco kept shooting at him. He dropped each butt on the ledge and carefully extinguished it with his heel, as he had done since Glasco had given him his first cigarette. When Glasco had gone over everything he could think of he paused for breath, and John said, "I wish you could convince me that life's worth living."

## 9.

THE CARGO NET, forty by twenty-five feet, was raised by ropes lowered from eighteenth-floor windows to the east and west of where John was standing. It rose slowly in steady jerks, passing the ledges on the eighth and twelfth floors, but just as it reached the sixteenth, some of the ropes it was being raised by fouled, and the net sagged against the hotel like a monster empty reticule. Firemen on the ground tried to spread it by ropes attached to its lower end, but could not. Riggers with pikes, who had been stationed at sixteenth-floor windows to keep a belly in the net when it was in position, began using their pikes in an effort to extend it.

"I'm ashamed to be doing this before all those people," John said. "They're anticipating something."

"We'll frustrate their intentions, Johnny," Glasco said.

"I've made up my mind."

"That's the way to talk. We'll frustrate the hell out of them."

Instead of crushing his cigarette under his heel, John threw it down at the street.

A hand holding a telephone thrust at Glasco through the curtains and a voice said, "It's for him."

"Got a call for you, John."

John took the telephone.

"Hello . . . Yes . . . Who is this? . . . Oh? Well, if you're my girl friend, what's our favorite poem?"

It was evident to Glasco that the lady was clueless. He suspected the Emergency Division man who had sponsored Miss Gregal. Just as John passed the telephone back, Glasco felt a tug on his ankle rope.

"I'll be right back, John. Just keep swinging, fella."

A coatless young man was standing with the Chief Inspector.

"He's been a friend of John's since they were kids together," the Chief Inspector explained. "Go ahead, son. Have a breather, Glasco."

The young man went to the window and leaned out. Glasco sat on the bed and rubbed his left leg, which had gone to sleep.

"How's it with that net?"

"Should be all set in a few minutes, Charlie. You think he can see it?"

"No, but I think he'll see those bosun's chairs when they come down from above."

"Well, they'll have that net ready in a few shakes, and then there'll be nothing to worry about."

"Gosh, I sure hope so," Glasco said, rubbing his leg. "It's been quite a day. I got all those stubs on my summonses to make out yet before I can go home."

Suddenly there was a tremendous roar from the crowd below.

"There he goes!"

Glasco thought of "They're off!" which the railbirds roar at the start of every horse race, and then he burst into tears.

## 10.

AS JOHN'S BODY passed the sixteenth floor a policeman, who had been stationed there to seize the strands of the net when it was raised before his window, made a lunge for him and barely missed. A magnesium flare was set off by the newsreel cameramen. John fell feet first as far as the eighth floor, where he grazed the ledge, then he whirled end-over-end until he struck the hotel marquee, almost hit a Homicide Squad lieutenant coming from under it, and landed partly on the sidewalk and partly in the gutter. A priest sprang forward to administer the last rites, but John was beyond all rites.

When John leaped, the crowds burst through the police lines and rushed toward the marquee. It took most of the Chief Inspector's detail of three hundred men to stop them. Scores of women fainted. John's body was swiftly put into an ambulance and taken to the West Forty-seventh Street station. A quarter of an hour after John's death, the new moon appeared in the sky, and, in its light, souvenir hunters scrambled for bits of the broken marquee glass.

The next day the nation's newspapers broke out with a rash of some of the worst editorials in the history of American journalism. The most offensive of these seemed to fall into three categories: those which compared John to the European dictators teetering on the brink of

war; those which compared Patrolman Glasco to Neville Chamberlain trying to make Adolf Hitler see reason; and those which deplored mob hysteria. Nearly all the newspapers which viewed mob hysteria with alarm simultaneously ran harrowing pictures of John's broken body lying on the sidewalk.

Three days after his death, John was buried in Evergreen Cemetery, Brooklyn. The funeral services, which had been scheduled to take place at 2 P.M. in a Brooklyn funeral home, were advanced four hours by the family in order to avoid curious throngs.

At closing time that Tuesday afternoon, while John was on the ledge trying to decide what to do, the manager of a Fifth Avenue department store estimated that his indecisiveness had cost the merchants of the district at least \$100,000. But by the end of the week the motion-picture industry was reporting that the newsreels showing John's final decision had already added \$1,000,000 to the regular grosses of the theaters which exhibited them in Greater New York. Perhaps it can be argued that in the end John William Warde more than paid his debt to metropolitan society.