



Molly laid it on the chest for Blaise to examine. It was a study in pencil, a reclining figure, half nude. It was unsigned, but the master hand of Renoir was in every stroke

# RECLINING FIGURE

By MARCO PAGE

**With the delicate Renoir forgery in his hands, Blaise had a clue to the murder  
—and was in danger himself. Without the forgery, he was only a chump**

**The Story:** ELLIS BLAISE, a young New York art dealer, was summoned to Los Angeles by LUCAS EDGERTON, an eccentric millionaire, to aid in the disposal of some paintings from his fabulous private collection. When Blaise arrived, he checked in at the Ocean Inn, where he found that JONAS ASTORG, a rival and not notably honest dealer, was waiting for him. Astorg proposed that he and Blaise work together. Blaise refused. When he reported for duty at Edgerton's house, Edgerton told him to go into the library and talk to MIRIAM WAYNE, his secretary. Entering the library, Blaise overheard Miriam arguing with Edgerton's son, SIMON, who was demanding that she tell him what pictures were to be sold. Interrupted, Simon left, and Miriam gave Blaise a set of cards listing the paintings.

In the gallery, Blaise met Edgerton's pretty niece, CASSY. While he was talking to her, Simon came in, followed by his father, who ordered him out of the gallery. Edgerton had brought along VICTOR GRANDI, a craftsman who was responsible for keeping the pictures in good condition, whom he wanted Blaise to meet. After everyone had left, Blaise discovered that the index cards were missing. Simon was presumed to have taken them, and Miriam told Blaise that Simon was in trouble.

Meantime, at the Ocean Inn, Astorg was meeting with KENNETH LURIE, who ran a Los Angeles gallery. The impending Edgerton sale had them worried, until Simon arrived with the index cards. Lurie leafed through them, and was reassured. "Not one of our paintings," he said. But Astorg was still troubled. He told Lurie that Edgerton had seen one of his own Renoir paintings in the house of a collector named NATHAN ORDMANN, and had seemed not to recognize it. Astorg had sold the painting to Ordmann.

Back at Edgerton's house, Blaise searched Simon's room, but couldn't find the cards. Cassy caught him there, and Blaise told her he thought Simon had been stealing paintings from the collection, which had only recently been catalogued, and was rattled now because his father might be intending to sell some of them, and would find them gone. Cassy said that Simon had stolen a painting before, and sold it to a dealer named HUGH NORDEN. His father had caught him at it.

Blaise went looking for Simon at a night club called the Lido, where he found him with MOLLY DANN, a model who posed for a drunken painter named PAUL WELDON. Simon seemed very poised, and gave Blaise the impression he'd done nothing wrong. Blaise left the Lido and encountered Norden, who denied he was involved in any chicanery with Simon.

Blaise went home and went to sleep. In the middle of the night, he was awakened by a LIEUTENANT IVES of the Homicide Bureau. Simon had been killed.

## II

ELLIS BLAISE sat down abruptly, looking at Lieutenant Ives. "Surprised?" the detective asked, and Blaise said, "What the hell do you think?"

"Do you own a gun, Mr. Blaise?" Ives asked, and when Blaise shook his head, he motioned to Sergeant Bonner. "Mind if the sergeant has a look around?" Blaise shook his head again and Ives motioned his aide into the bedroom. Then the lieutenant sat down in a chair near Blaise and hunched it forward so that he was in an attentive pose. "You were searching Simon Edgerton's room last night. Later on, you were with him in a night club." When Blaise didn't speak up, he asked, "Ever have much to do with the police?"

"Not much," Blaise said.

"I have," Lieutenant Ives said genially. "One thing I've learned: in a murder you've got to tell what you know. That's how it's got to be."

"I know," Blaise said reluctantly. "The thing is, I work for Lucas Edgerton."

"You're a picture dealer," Ives said, "not a priest or a lawyer." He looked up past Blaise as Sergeant Bonner came from the bedroom. The sergeant said nothing but shook his head.

As Bonner took up his post at the door, the lieutenant said, "What about it, Mr. Blaise?"

Blaise nodded. "Sure. I guess that's how it's got to be."

"Wait in the car, Bonner," Ives said.

"Have you talked to Cass Edgerton?" Blaise asked.

"Some. Not a lot."

Blaise told Ives the nature of his assignment to sell some paintings and about Simon's tension earlier that day; then about the loss of the cards and what he knew of Simon's earlier escapades. "That's why I went to the Lido to talk to him. The odd part," he said thoughtfully, "is that he told me he wasn't in any trouble, and I believed him. Then, as I was on my way out, Hugh Norden was going in." He described the simple maneuver that had revealed Norden's identity, and described Norden's conduct with the gun when he had pushed his way into Norden's apartment.

"What time did you leave Norden?" Ives asked.

"Between twelve thirty and one—say twelve forty-five."

"Simon Edgerton was shot at about three," Ives said. "We sent a car to pick up Norden at four thirty. He was gone—packed in a hurry, and gone."

"I had the damndest feeling about him last night," Blaise said. "He was scared to the trembling point when I came in, but when I told him I thought he and Simon had been selling stolen paintings, he seemed relieved. He wasn't frightened any more, but actually patronizing, as if he knew something big and private."

"He didn't get around to any details?"

"No. He and Simon had some kind of a racket going, and it involved the Edgerton collection—I'm sure of that. It wasn't anything as simple as unloading some stolen paintings, because both of them—Simon and Norden—reacted with obvious relief when I brought that up. I don't know what they were up to, but I think Simon died because of it."

"The gatekeeper," Ives said, "tells me he let Simon's car in a few minutes before three. Apparently, he went right up to the house. A few minutes after three, the gateman thought he saw a light on the beach. While he was investigating, he heard a shot and found Simon's body outside the gallery, under an open window. He'd been shot by someone standing right beside him, at point-blank range. It was a mess." The lieutenant looked out at the gray dawn that was starting to stretch over the ocean. "Been a long night," he muttered, and yawned heavily. "How were things at the house? All one big, happy family?"

"I just got here," Blaise said pointedly.

Ives nodded. "The old man's secretary—Miriam Wayne—she was hit hard. An emotional type, would you say?"

"I would if I could."

"Anything special going on there?"

"I wouldn't know."

Lieutenant Ives stood up wearily. "Sorry I broke up your sleep. Thanks."

Blaise took him to the door. It was after six now. He dressed quickly and fortified himself with some coffee at an all-night stand, then drove to the Edgerton place. There was a police car in the driveway, just inside the gates, and a trooper was standing by the gatekeeper. The gatekeeper identified him, the gates were opened, and Blaise drove up to the house.

Lucas Edgerton was standing in the driveway between the house and the gallery. He watched with dull, somber eyes as Blaise parked the car.

"I'm sorry," Blaise said. "The police woke me up, and I drove out to see if I could help."

EDGERTON beckoned him into the gallery. Miriam Wayne was seated at the desk. A pot of coffee was on a typewriter table, and she had a cup before her.

Edgerton said, "Show him the cards, Miriam."

She lifted the blotter on the desk, first moving the coffee to one side, and handed him the small, flat package of cards. "They were on the floor, between those two cabinets," she said, pointing to the nearest section of the index.

"Did you look there when you missed them?" Edgerton demanded.

"Yes, I did. I made a point of looking under the desk, back of the files—everywhere."

"The damn' fool," blurted Edgerton. "The poor, damfool boy," he said again, and then turned away abruptly. After a moment, still with his back turned, Edgerton said, "I want an inventory taken right away."

Miriam Wayne nodded. "I'll start on it at once."

Edgerton faced them again. His face was lined and tired, and his eyes were burning. "We'll do it together," he said.

"I see." She faced him steadily, her voice, as always, perfectly controlled. "Very well, then. Whenever you're ready." She picked up her purse, which was dangling on the back of the chair, and started out. "I'll be in my room," she said.

Edgerton was already pacing up and down between the desk and the door. "Blaise!" he snapped. "What kind of trouble was the boy in?"

Blaise found it hard to meet the old man's eyes. "I don't know that he was in any trouble at all. For a while yesterday I thought maybe Simon had been helping himself to some of your paintings. I talked to him about that last night and then I talked to Hugh Norden. I came to the conclusion that I was wrong—that Simon hadn't taken anything."

"I'd like to think it was true," Edgerton said. "I'd like to be sure it was true."

"The police will sift it all now. Last night I thought I might be able to throw a scare into Simon—or into Norden. They both laughed at me."

"What could it have been?"

Blaise shrugged. "That's anybody's guess." Confronted with Edgerton's staring, hopeless expression, he added reluctantly, "If I come on anything, I'll follow it up. Mostly, though, it's for the police."

"All right." The old man walked to the window, cranked it open, and shook his head as if to clear it of weariness and anxiety. "I'm an old man, Blaise," he said dully. "I was past forty when the boy was born. Not a good age to be a father. Not if you're busy with a bank, factories, real estate and an art collection. I was hardly aware of my son until he was in trouble." (Continued on page 53)

ILLUSTRATED BY HOWARD FORSBERG

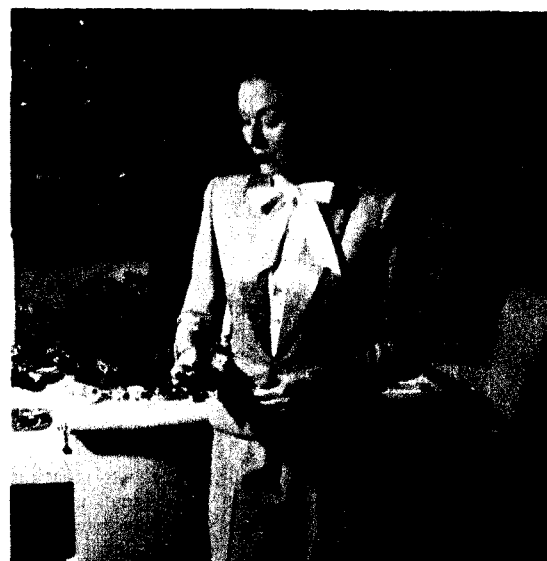




One of the nation's best-dressed women is Carola Panerai Mandel (above). She's also one of the best skeet shooters in the country. Major reason for both accomplishments is her poise



In knit dress, Mrs. Mandel admires trophies: hers for skeet shooting, husband's for polo



In "tuxedo" she designed herself for dining at home, Carola arranges flowers for table

## SKEET and LOVELY

**C**AROLA PANERAI MANDEL, of Chicago, is a slim, elegant, raven-haired beauty who conveys the impression that she has never lifted anything heavier than her long-lashed eyelids. Her hands are delicate instruments seemingly designed solely for the ladylike task of arranging flowers in a crystal bowl. Mrs. Mandel does well with her eyelashes, and she's an expert in the flower department, but in her spare time she likes nothing better than to blast 4½-inch skeet targets whizzing past her at something like 70 miles per hour.

Last August, when other Chicago ladies were sitting primly under protecting parasols, Carola Mandel, wife of Leon Mandel who owns one of Chicago's biggest department stores, was down in Dallas, Texas, ignoring a 103-degree heat wave to win two national skeet-shooting titles. Dressed for work in plaid shirt and tweed skirt, the fragile Cuban-born lady captured the 20-gauge shotgun competition for women with a perfect score (100 out of 100), and the 12-gauge event with only two misses (98 out of 100). A few weeks earlier, triumphing over a platoon of veteran male marks-

men, she had become the first woman to win the Illinois Open-High-Over-All Championship in that contest's 25-year history.

Expert observers who guessed that Mrs. Mandel must have been born with an eight-pound gun in her hand were surprised to learn that the thirty-one-year-old socialite has been shooting skeets for only three years. Before that, like many another resident of Chicago's swank Near North Side, she had spent much of her time decorating her three-story town house and living up to her reputation for being one of America's best-dressed women—a distinction bestowed upon her by New York's Fashion Academy for the third time in 1951. Today, despite her enthusiasm for smashing high-flying clay disks, her home remains a show place and her sartorial reputation is undiminished.

In the enviable position of being able to buy virtually anything in sight, and being, because of her figure (five feet five and 118 pounds), able to wear practically anything with consummate grace, Mrs. Mandel might be expected to own more dresses than her husband's big store. She doesn't. She

buys moderate quantities of simple clothes, and depends for effect on well-chosen accessories.

"I keep a drawer filled with scarves," she says. "I wear them around the neck, or at the waist like a sash. It's really wonderful how merely changing a scarf gives an entirely different look to a simple dark suit."

As a matter of fact, Mrs. Mandel seldom feels at home in an outfit until she's worn it six or seven times. "It takes that long," she tells more extravagant friends, "to learn which accessories create the best effects. If a woman builds her wardrobe around clothes which are fitted to her own coloring and figure requirements, she need not depend on season-to-season fashion trends. She can wear what she has for years."

Mrs. Mandel doesn't try to overpower anybody with her clothes. "In skeet shooting," she says, "the secret is to let the target run into your shot. It's the same with clothes: you look your best and the target will be suitably impressed without being hit in the eye." Even Annie Oakley wouldn't have argued with that.

BILL FAY

PHOTOGRAPHS FOR COLLIER'S BY ARTHUR SHAY