



Lead with your left ([A Harper detective novel])

Ed Lacy

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a selection from the first chapter: Tuesday Night It was a few minutes before eleven when I unlocked our door. The dumb lamp we had in the two-by-four "foyer" was on. The lamp looked like a drippy flower and cost fifty-seven bucks strictly because it was imported from Denmark. If all their lamps are like this job they must be blind over there. I could just about make out the couch opened as a bed, was surprised Mary was in the hay so early. I called out softly, "Babes?" She didn't answer. I took off my coat and tie, then my shoulder holster, went through my pockets and put everything on the table beside the lamp. I dropped my suit on the floor; it was due for the cleaner's anyway and we only had one closet and no room for soiled clothes. I went to the John and washed, afraid I'd wake Mary if I moved the Chinese screen in front of our "kitchenette" for a snack. For a hundred and twenty bucks a month you'd think we'd have room enough to move around. But not at this "good" address on East Sixty-ninth Street. Still I couldn't entirely blame Mary, I got some kicks out of living in a swank joint, and all the modern nutty furniture we were in hock for. And yesterday almost all my pay check went for old bills. What kicks. But the old railroad flat in the Bronx had its features too. Like now I could go way up to the front room and get the news on TV, see who'd won the fight as I worked on an apple. But no TV watching in a one-room apartment, not even a swank one. Turning out the damn light I carefully threaded my way through the furniture and climbed into the sack. Bed felt great. I'd been going since eight in the morning. Staring up at the darkness I wondered if Ed Owens had lived in a hundred-and-twenty-buck apartment. I saw Owens in the alley again. The wrong angle his body made said he had to be dead. Who dropped the newspaper over his face, the headline and pictures about the ball game? Why don't they want anybody to see a dead face? Or maybe the dead don't want to see us live jokers. Mary had a heavy way of breathing, almost a light snore. I didn't hear it so she wasn't asleep, just laying there sore as a boil at me. I reached under the cover for her hips. She wasn't wearing one of my old shirts, but those damn ski-pajamas she bought to spite me. When my fingers found her she pulled away. I said, "Look, honey, I did try to call—at six—but you weren't home. I got stuck on a big case." "Sure, you put in overtime, four to eleven, seven hours—a day's work on a normal job. What did you get, time and a half or double time, for it?" She had that nasty shrillness to her voice that reminded me of Mom when she was steamed, way she sounded when she knew I was out boxing. The shrillness that meant—with both Mary and Mom—that talking was a waste of time. But I was so full of it I had to talk. "Look, Babes, this is real big. I was in on the killing of an ex-cop. Guy named Ed Owens was shot down right in—" "I'm not interested!" "Mary, this was one of these dumb killings where a—" "I couldn't care less!" I sat up in bed. "A man who'd been a good cop, gave almost thirty years of his life to protecting people, was shot down in an alley. Sure, - you're not interested, nobody is. That's the trouble today, nobody gives a fat damn about any-. thing or—" Mary turned over, faced me in the darkness. "Dave, you came home seven goddam hours late, seven hours, so I'm hardly in the mood for any of your childish speeches."

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