

LIFE

LEAVING FOR THE MOON



Neil Armstrong,
commander of Apollo 11,
sets out for
the launching pad

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A novelist probes the tale of four horrible murders on Cape Cod

by **KURT VONNEGUT JR.**

Mr. Vonnegut, author of Cat's Cradle and the best-selling Slaughterhouse-Five, lives on Cape Cod.

Jack the Ripper used to get compliments on the way he dissected the women he killed. "It is stated that some anatomical skill seems to have been displayed in the way in which the lower part of the body was mutilated," said the *London Times* of Oct. 1, 1888.

Now Cape Cod has a mutilator. The pieces of four young women were found in February and March of this year—in shallow graves in Truro. Whoever did it was no artist with a knife. He chopped up the women with what the police guess was probably a brush hook or an ax.

It couldn't have taken too long to do.

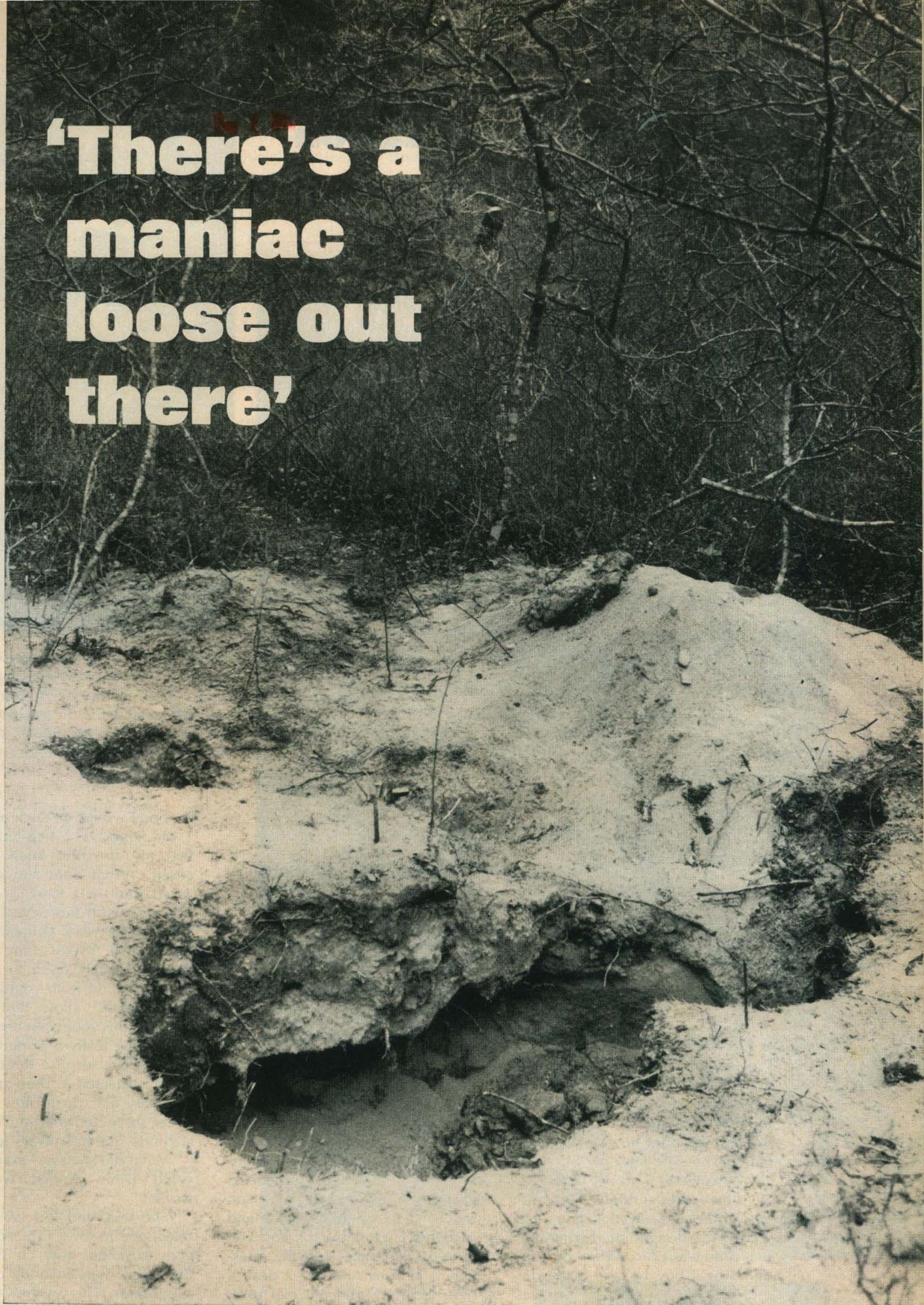
At least two of the women, a schoolteacher and a college girl from Providence, R.I., had been shot with a .22. Since the victims were cut into so many random chunks, only the murderer could make an intelligent guess as to what the actual causes of death might have been.

Stained rope was found at the foot of a tree near the graves. There was also rope around one of the victims' heads, and so on. The details are horrible and pitiful and sickening.

The police are sure they have the murderer. He is locked up now in the Barnstable County House of Correction—high on a hill, three blocks from here. He is a divorced

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'There's a maniac loose out there'



PATRICIA WALSH



MARY ANN WYSOCKI



SUSAN PERRY IN 1965



SYDNEY MONZON

Hidden in the tangled "upland" behind Truro cemetery is a shallow hole in the Cape Cod sand. It is one of three graves, found earlier this year, that held the hacked-up remains of four girls at left.

A declined invitation to a marijuana patch



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Provincetown carpenter, a gentle, quiet six-footer—a 24-year-old whose ex-wife, Avis, is prepared to testify that he is innocent. He married her after he got her pregnant—when she was only 14.

His name is Antone C. Costa. He is the father of three. "He wanted a little girl," says his wife. "He was a little disappointed when the first child was a boy. When the second was a boy he was really depressed. But when Nichole was born he was overjoyed. He adores Nichole."

My 19-year-old daughter Edith knows Tony Costa. She met him during a crazy summer she spent on her own in Provincetown, knew him well enough to receive and decline an invitation he evidently extended to many girls: "Come and see my marijuana patch."

There really was a marijuana patch for girls to see, Tony claims, a modest one—two female plants not far from the graves.

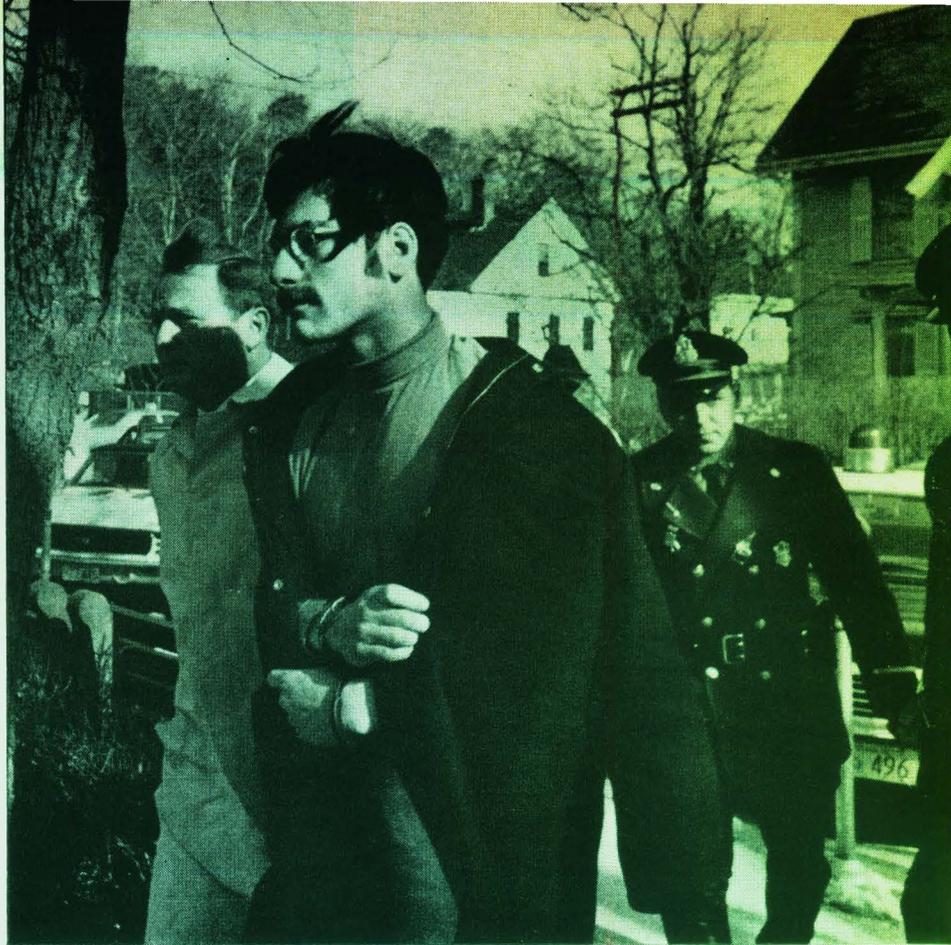
Graffiti seen recently on the wall

of a Truro Laundromat: "Tony Costa digs girls."

Sick joke told recently on Cape Cod: "Tony Costa, with his mustache and long sideburns and granny glasses and dark turtleneck, walked into the Everett H. Corson Cadillac agency in Hyannis, and priced an El Dorado. 'It'll cost you an arm and a leg,' said the salesman. And Tony said, 'It's a deal.'"

An architect told me that joke. He laughed nervously afterward. And I sense that his giggling blankness in the face of horror is a reaction typical of most middle-class males on Cape Cod. The blankness is a failure to imagine why anybody would want to chop up four harmless girls.

Edmund Dinis, the district attorney who will personally present the Commonwealth's case against Costa, is troubled by this blankness too. "In this instance," he told us, "we will not attempt to establish a motive. Who knows why



Tony Costa, 24, a Provincetown carpenter, was arrested after Providence girls' bodies were found, and led manacled into courthouse. His former wife Avis (left) says she will testify to his innocence.

anybody would do such a thing?"

Mr. Dinis was interested to hear that my daughter knew the accused. "What does she say?" he asked. Dinis is a large, grave, earnest man who has never married. He is three years younger than I am, which makes him 44. He seemed bleakly open to any sort of information from young people which would allow him to understand this young people's crime.

"If Tony really is a murderer," I said, "it is a surprise to Edith. She never suspected it. Then again, she isn't very old. Up to now she has never suspected that much evil in anybody. She has always felt safe."

"What did she say—exactly," insisted Dinis. "What were her words?"

"She said, and this was on the telephone to Iowa City, where she goes to school now: 'If Tony is a murderer, then anybody could be a murderer.' This was news to her."

Mr. Dinis sat back, disappointed. What he had hoped to hear, I guess, was something enlightening about the culture of the hippies, who are so numerous in Provincetown—maybe talk about drugs.

I myself have spoken to a few young people about the Provincetown drug scene, have put this question to them: "If the person who committed the Truro murders was high on something when he killed, what drug do you think he took?" I remind them how crude

the butchery was, how shallow the graves were, even though it would have been easy to dig deep ones in the woodland floor, which was sand.

The answer, invariably: "Speed."

The Truro murders may not be speed murders, and Tony Costa may not have committed them—but he has had at least one really awful trip on speed. That was in San Francisco. He thought he was going to suffocate, and passed out. So he was admitted to the emergency room of a hospital.

I found out about that from Lester Allen, one of two Cape Codders I know who are writing books about the murders. Mr. Allen is a retired newspaperman who has seen seven executions—three of them in one night. They made him ill. He has been hired by the defense lawyers, two local men, to find out all he can that will help Tony's cause. Tony and his friends and relatives have talked to him copiously. He has 1,100 pages of transcribed conversations so far.

Nowhere in all those pages, he told me, is there the slightest hint of how or why the murders were done. Nobody can imagine.

After Tony was arrested, he was sent to Bridgewater State Hospital for observation. He was polite but uncommunicative. At one point, though, he asked to see the district attorney. He wanted to ask Mr. Dinis what he was doing about the murders on Cape Cod. He said this: "There's a maniac loose out there."

"Everybody closely related to the case has had some experience with

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'Is this going to be bad for the freaks?'

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drugs," Lester Allen told me, "except, of course, for the lawyers and police." He finds the culture of the young in Provincetown so different from his own that he often sounds like an anthropologist far from home—among the Kwakiutls, say, or the Yukaghir.

Among the young, Hermann Hesse is thought to be a very great writer. Authority is despised because of its cruel stupidities in pot busts and slums and Vietnam. Pot and speed and LSD are easily available close to home—or were, anyway, until Tony got busted for murder. Participants in the culture often refer to themselves as "freaks."

Here is a question a Provincetown freak put to a straight person, a diffident attempt to find out how angry the straight community might be about the chopped-up women: "Is this going to be bad for the freaks?"

Freaks are worth money to the businessman on the narrow streets of Provincetown. Thousands of tourists come in the summertime to gawk at them—and to gawk at all the shameless, happy fags, and at the painters and the Portuguese fishermen, too. I doubt that tourists seeing Tony around town last summer found him much of an attraction. He was customarily neat and clean—cleaner than almost anybody, in fact, since he took three showers a day.

Tony wouldn't have been a summer attraction anyway. The tourist season runs roughly from June first until Labor Day. The murders were off-season crimes.

Tony Costa has an ulcer, says Lester Allen.

When the bodies were found late last winter, tourists arrived off-season. Many brought kiddies and shovels and picnic lunches. They wanted to help dig. They were puzzled when park rangers and police and firemen found them disgusting.

Headline in the Cape Cod Standard Times, March 9, 1969:

MORBID MAGNET DRAWS CROWDS TO TRURO GRAVES

Lester Allen assures me that an enterprising young businessman is now selling packaged sand from the grave sites for 50¢ a pound. Want some?

Here is who the pitiful victims were, in order of off-season death: Sydney Monzon, 18, a local girl

from Eastham, who disappeared around May 25, 1968. She was working for a Provincetown A&P, left her bike leaning against the store one day, was never seen again. Her sister thought she had gone to Europe with another girl. Bon voyage.

Susan Perry, 17, of Provincetown, who disappeared Sept. 8—after Labor Day. Her parents were divorced. Her father was a fisherman. Her parents never reported her missing, assumed that she had moved to another town. Bon voyage again. Hers was the first body found. It was identified by a ring—her mother's wedding band.

Patricia Walsh and Mary Ann Wysocki, both 23, both of Providence, who came to Provincetown together on Friday, Jan. 24 of this year—in Miss Walsh's pale blue VW bug. They were on an off-season lark. If they knew Tony, they gave no sign of it when their landlady introduced them to him after they had checked into a rooming house for \$5 a night. Off-season rates are incredibly low.

Tony, divorced for about six months, was staying there too. He helped with their luggage. Who says chivalry is dead?

And Miss Walsh and Miss Wysocki vanished. Their empty car was spotted near the marijuana patch, then the car vanished too. Then bodies were found—not two, but four.

The missing car showed up in storage in Burlington, Vt. It had been stored by Tony Costa, so they busted him for murder.

Evelyn Lawson, a Hyannis friend of mine, a columnist for the Register, a weekly paper, is also writing a book about the murders. With the help of Provincetown's Norman Mailer, she got a contract with World Publishing. New American Library made a lot of money with *The Boston Strangler*. Tony Curtis made a lot of money out of that one too.

The strangler was another New England specialist in killing women, as opposed to men. Women are so easy to kill—so weak and friendly, so fond of new people and places, of dates. And what symbols they are.

Evelyn Lawson is a witchcraft buff. She is also a Provincetown expert, an exotic métier. The village at the fingertip of the Cape seems a passionate and foreign little port to most people farther up the arm. As almost everybody knows, Cape Cod is shaped like a human arm. Chatham is at the elbow, Falmouth

and Cataumet and Buzzards Bay are in the armpit. I live atop the biceps. The murdered women were found at the wrist.

The 100% American Pilgrims anchored briefly off Provincetown, did some laundry, then hastened on to Plymouth. There are now Portuguese where they did their laundry, and New Yorkers, and God-knows-what-else up there. "Many of the first settlers were pirates and moon-cussers," says Evelyn. "Many were runaway witches who escaped from Salem."

Here is what she wrote in her column after the district attorney held a sensational press conference about the bodies: "As Dinis talked . . . I felt my skin prickle in dread and disgust. The place where the bodies had been found . . . was near an old cemetery, not far from a back dirt crossroad, the typical traditional site for the witches' Sabbath ceremonies. . . . Dinis indicated there was evidence of cannibalism."

Evelyn further on described Tony Costa's being taken off to jail, with his many friends watching. "One of the long-haired men of this group," she wrote, "got down on

his knees in front of the prisoner and reached for and kissed his manacled hands, proclaiming loudly: 'Tony, we love you!'"

The kissing of the manacled hands, incidentally, didn't really happen. Evelyn didn't see it, simply heard about it, as did I, from everywhere. It was such a typical thing for a freak to do, even if he didn't do it.

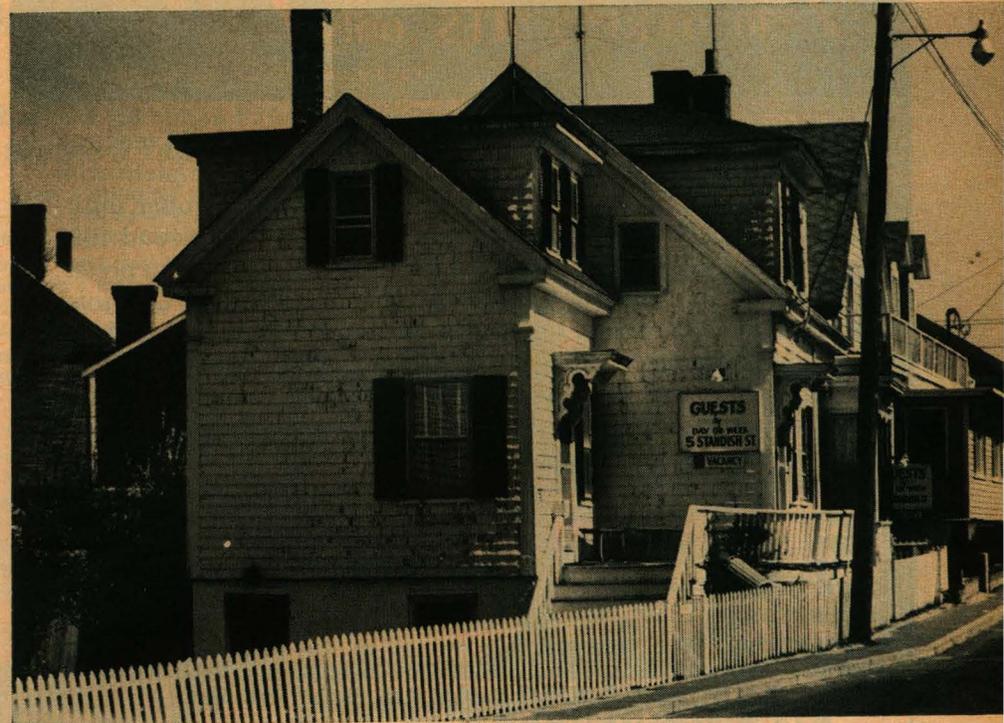
And the district attorney may have been stretching facts, too, when he mentioned cannibals. He also announced that some of the hearts were missing. The next day, the medical examiner, who should know, said the hearts were there.

The so-called news became so loud and gruesome that Costa's lawyers went to court about it, complained justly of publicity ". . . fraught with images of sexual perversions, mutilation, diabolic mischief and suggestions of occultism." They asked a judge to stop the mouths of the prosecuting authorities. The judge complied.

So it is quiet now—except for a few tiny leaks.

You can meet people in bars some-

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In this guest house on Standish Street, near the center of Provincetown, the slain girls checked in for the night last January. At the time, Tony Costa was renting a room there by the week. He was introduced to the other guests by the landlady, Mrs. Patricia Morton—shown at right at the time of Costa's arraignment holding a newspaper featuring the murders.



'Is it possible that Tony was framed?'

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times who want to leak for money. Their brother-in-law knows a guard up at the jail who sees Costa every day—and so on. If I wanted to see the official color photographs of what was left of the women, I could probably get them from somebody—if I were willing to pay.

I might even be able to buy a piece of the rope—*after* the trial. Business is business, after all, and always has been. There is money to be made on the fringes of famous murders. For instance: I am being paid.

Murder is no novelty on Cape Cod—nor are multiple murders that reek of drugs. Back in the lemonade summer of good old 1901, a nurse named Jane Toppan murdered Alden P. Davis, his wife and his two daughters with morphine and atropine. This was in lovely Cataumet, about 10 miles from here, where windmills sometimes still ground grain.

Leonard Wood, commander of the swashbuckling Rough Riders in the Spanish-American War, was vacationing there at the time. The President was McKinley, who was about to be shot. It might be argued that Jane Toppan was, in her own way, responding to the corporate greed and the militarism and the murderousness and corruption of her times. If so, she certainly responded in a great big way. She confessed not only to the Alden murders, but to 27 others besides.

She died in a crazyhouse in 1938. That is surely where multiple murderers belong—in a crazyhouse.

Jane Toppan was an orphan who never could find out who her parents were. Tony Costa, on the other hand, knows all about his parents, and about shoals of other affectionate relatives. His father was a hero off New Guinea in the Second World War. He saved another sailor who was drowning. Then he banged his head on a coral outcrop and died. Tony has a newspaper clipping about this, proudly shows it around.

His father's life was insured for \$10,000. Part of this treasure was put in trust for Tony by his mother, who remarried after a while. She still lives in Provincetown. When Tony was only 13, he was keeping books and handling business correspondence and making out the income tax for his stepfather, a mason.

How straight can you be?

Tony has an intelligence quotient of 121.

Tony and his ex-wife used to be Catholics. They aren't anymore. Avis said the other day, "We both believe in reincarnation, psychodelia, and God in nature."

She divorced him a year ago June, charging him with "... cruel and abusive treatment." This is a customary accusation, even among timid souls, in divorce actions in the Commonwealth.

Reporters who talk to Provincetown freaks about Tony often hear him spoken of in the past tense—as though he were long gone, would never return. They resent the gory advance publicity.

They want one thing very much for Tony: a fair trial.

Is it possible that Tony was framed? In early 1968 he did one of the most suicidal things a young drug-dabbler can do: he told the local fuzz that so-and-so was selling dope. So-and-so was busted. There was a certain amount of tribal justice in this: so-and-so was from out of town.

But who would chop up and bury four nice girls to frame one small canary?

Tony was a spoiled little boy, one hears. He was never punished for anything.

In his closet in the roominghouse where he helped Patricia Walsh and Mary Ann Wysocki with their luggage, police found a coil of stained rope.

Young women in America will continue to look for love and excitement in places that are as dangerous as hell. I salute them for their optimism and their nerve.

I remember now my own daughter's summer in Provincetown, where she was supposedly studying painting with oils. After that summer, she told me and her mother about a young man who would inform her from time to time that he wanted to kill her—and would. She didn't bother the police with this. It was a joke, she supposed—like inviting somebody to come see a marijuana patch.

When Tony was arrested, I called her up in Iowa City, and I said, "Edith—that guy who kept saying he was going to kill you: was his name Tony Costa?"

"No, no," she said. "Tony wouldn't say anything like that. Tony wasn't the one."

Then I told her about Tony Costa's arrest. ◀