

*GINO'S REWARD*

Allen Smith

Gino was a good boy. His parents thought he was the finest boy in the neighborhood. When a neighbor came to Gino's parents and told them he had seen Gino do something wrong, they were indignant. After a while, the neighbors gave up and nothing more was said about Gino to his parents. To his parents' way of thinking, this was proof that Gino was a good boy.

At eighteen he was the eldest of seven children in his family and had lived on the lower east side of New York all his life. His father owned a small grocery store, whose upstairs served as their home, on East 3rd Street. Even though Gino's parents had barely enough money to feed and clothe all the children, they managed to have enough "extra" money to give Gino when he wanted it.

Without giving his parents a reason, Gino asked them for ten dollars. His parents, without asking for a reason, gave him the money. Gino was a good boy, they reasoned, so he must need the money for a purpose.

Gino needed the money to pay for his initiation into the "Paragons," a collection of misfits who got their kicks by taking out their frustrations on anyone or anything that was near. That evening Gino was to become a member of the "Paragons."

The initiation was simple—Gino was to steal a car and wreck it while the "Paragons" watched. Gino did not hesitate to smash the stolen car, but he was not satisfied. Why shouldn't he do more, he thought.

Gino pulled out his knife and walked over to one of the parked cars. He opened the door, reached inside, and slashed the seats with his knife. As a parting gesture, he slashed the tires. He was a "Paragon" now!

Gino was swelled with self-importance as he walked up the stairs to his house. The smile left his face as he opened the door and stepped inside.

There, lying on the sofa, was his father. The doctor and Gino's mother were standing over him. The expression on their faces was one that Gino did not understand. The doctor left Gino's mother and walked over to him. "Son, I'm sorry but your father's gone. It

was a heart attack.”

Gino's whole body was numb. He couldn't speak or even cry out.

The the doctor spoke again. “You see, son, if I had been able to get here sooner, I could have saved your father. I got here as fast as I could after the car was repaired. Some hoodlums slit the tires on my car about an hour ago.”

