ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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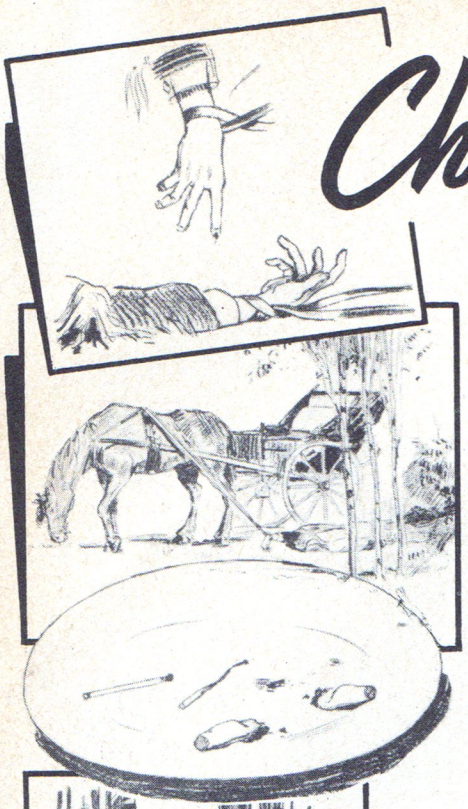
JANUARY 1943

AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE BEST DETECTIVE STORIES, NEW AND OLD



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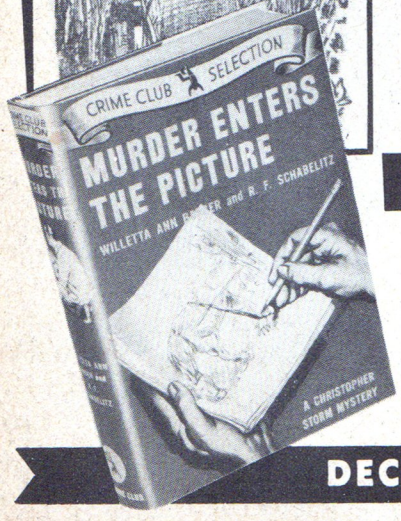

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EDITOR

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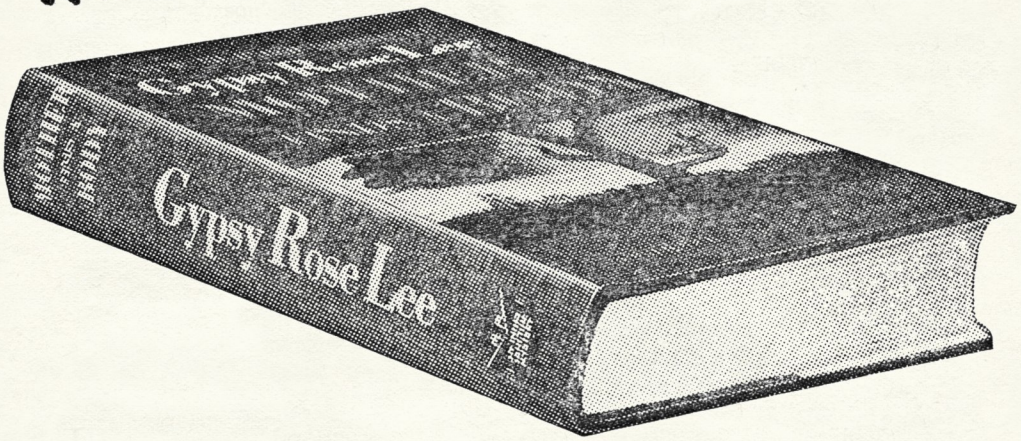

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Last year, in our September issue, we brought you Anthony Boucher's "Screwball Division," in which Mr. Boucher introduced to us his "screwball" detective, Nick Noble. We asked Mr. Boucher to invent a new detective: Mr. Boucher, who knows Hollywood so well, came through valiantly with a Hollywood detective, Mr. Quilter, who pairs off with an ordinary cop named Tom Smith to make a delightful new detecting team. This story has never been published anywhere. Merry Xmas!

MYSTERY FOR CHRISTMAS

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

THAT was why the Benson jewel robbery was solved — because Aram Melekian was too much for Mr. Quilter's temper.

His almost invisible eyebrows soared, and the scalp of his close-cropped head twitched angrily. "Damme!" said Mr. Quilter, and in that mild and archaic oath there was more compressed fury than in paragraphs of uncensored profanity. "So you, sir, are the untrammeled creative artist, and I am a drudging, hampering hack!"

Aram Melekian tilted his hat a trifle more jauntily. "That's the size of it, brother. And if you hamper this untrammeled opus any more, Metropolis Pictures is going to be sueing its youngest genius for breach of contract."

Mr. Quilter rose to his full lean height. "I've seen them come and go," he announced; "and there hasn't been a one of them, sir, who failed to learn something from me. What is so creative about pouring out the full vigor of your young life? The creative task is mine, molding that vigor, shaping it to some end."

"Go play with your blue pencil," Melekian suggested. "I've got a dream coming on."

"Because I have never produced anything myself, you young men jeer at me. You never see that your successful screen plays are more my effort than your inspiration." Mr. Quilter's thin frame was aquiver.

"Then what do you need us for?"

"What — Damme, sir, what indeed? Ha!" said Mr. Quilter loudly. "I'll show you. I'll pick the first man off the street that has life and a story in him. What more do you contribute? And through me he'll turn out a job that will sell. If I do this, sir, then will you consent to the revisions I've asked of you?"

"Go lay an egg," said Aram Melekian. "And I've no doubt you will."

Mr. Quilter stalked out of the studio with high dreams. He saw the horny-handed son of toil out of whom he had coaxed a masterpiece signing a contract with F. X. He saw a discomfited Armenian genius in the background busily devouring his own words. He saw himself freed of his own sense of frustration, proving at last that his was the significant part of writing.

He felt a bumping shock and the squealing of brakes. The next thing he saw was the asphalt paving.

Mr. Quilter rose to his feet undecided whether to curse the driver for knocking him down or bless him for stopping so miraculously short of danger. The young man in the brown suit was so disarmingly concerned that the latter choice was inevitable.

"I'm awfully sorry," the young man blurted. "Are you hurt? It's this bad wing of mine, I guess." His left arm was in a sling.

"Nothing at all, sir. My fault. I was preoccupied . . ."

They stood awkwardly for a moment, each striving for a phrase that was not mere politeness. Then they both spoke at once.

"You came out of that studio," the young man said. "Do you" (his tone was awed) "do you *work* there?"

And Mr. Quilter had spotted a sheaf of eight and a half by eleven paper protruding from the young man's pocket. "Are you a writer, sir? Is that a manuscript?"

The young man shuffled and came near blushing. "Naw. I'm not a writer. I'm a policeman. But I'm going to be a writer. This is a story I was trying to tell about what happened to me — But are you a writer? In *there?*"

Mr. Quilter's eyes were aglow under their invisible brows. "I, sir," he announced proudly, "am what makes writers tick. Are you interested?"

He was also, he might have added, what makes *detectives* tick. But he did not know that yet.

The Christmas trees were lighting up in front yards and in windows as Officer Tom Smith turned his rickety Model A onto the side street where Mr. Quilter lived. Hollywood is full of these quiet streets, where ordinary people live and move and have their being, and are happy or unhappy as chance wills, but both in a normal and unspectacular way. This is really Hollywood — the Hollywood that patronizes the twenty-cent fourth-run houses and crowds the stores on the Boulevard on Dollar Day.

To Mr. Quilter, saturated at the studio with the other Hollywood, this was always a relief. Kids were playing ball in the evening sun, radios were tuning in to Amos and Andy, and from the small houses came either the smell of cooking or the clatter of dish-washing.

And the Christmas trees, he knew, had been decorated not for the benefit of the photographers from the fan magazines, but because the children liked them and they looked warm and friendly from the street.

"Gosh, Mr. Quilter," Tom Smith was saying, "this is sure a swell break for me. You know, I'm a good copper. But to be honest I don't know as I'm very bright. And that's why I want to write, because maybe that way I can train myself to be and then I won't be a plain patrolman all my life. And besides, this writing, it kind of itches-like inside you."

"*Cacoëthes scribendi*," observed Mr. Quilter, not unkindly. "You see, sir, you have hit, in your fumbling way, on one of the classic expressions for your condition."

"Now that's what I mean. You know what I mean even when I don't say it. Between us, Mr. Quilter . . ."

Mr. Quilter, his long thin legs outdistancing even the policeman's, led the way into his bungalow and on down the hall to a room which at first glance contained nothing but thousands of books. Mr. Quilter waved at them. "Here, sir, is assembled every helpful fact that mortal need know. But I cannot breathe life into these dry bones. Books are not written from books. But I can provide bones, and correctly articulated, for the life which you, sir — But here is a chair. And a reading lamp. Now, sir, let me hear your story."

Tom Smith shifted uncomfortably on the chair. "The trouble is," he confessed, "it hasn't got an ending."

Mr. Quilter beamed. "When I have heard it, I shall demonstrate to you, sir, the one ending it inevitably must have."

"I sure hope you will, because it's got to have and I promised her it would have and — You know Beverly Benson?"

"Why, yes. I entered the industry at the beginning of talkies. She was still somewhat in evidence. But why . . .?"

"I was only a kid when she made *Sable Sin* and *Orchids at Breakfast* and all the rest, and I thought she was something pretty marvelous. There was a girl in our high school was supposed to look like her, and I used to think, 'Gee, if I could ever see the real Beverly Benson!' And last night I did."

"Hm. And this story, sir, is the result?"

"Yeah. And this too." He smiled wryly and indicated his wounded arm. "But I better read you the story." He cleared his throat loudly. "*The Red and Green Mystery*," he declaimed. "By Arden Van Arden."

"A pseudonym, sir?"

"Well, I sort of thought . . . Tom Smith — that doesn't sound like a writer."

"Arden Van Arden, sir, doesn't sound like anything. But go on."

And Officer Tom Smith began his narrative:

THE RED AND GREEN MYSTERY

by ARDEN VAN ARDEN

It was a screwy party for the police to bust in on. Not that it was a raid or anything like that. God knows I've run into some bughouse parties that way, but I'm assigned to the jewelry squad now under Lieutenant Michaels, and when this call came in he took three other guys and me and we shot out to the big house in Laurel Canyon.

I wasn't paying much attention to where we were going and I wouldn't have known the place anyway, but I knew *her*, all right. She was standing in the doorway waiting for us. For just a minute it stumped me who she was, but then I knew. It was the eyes mostly. She'd changed a lot since *Sable Sin*, but you still couldn't miss the Beverly Benson eyes. The rest of her had got older (not older exactly either — you might maybe say richer) but the eyes were still the same. She had red hair. They didn't have technicolor when she was in pictures and I hadn't ever known what color her hair was. It struck me funny seeing her like that — the way I'd been nuts about her when I was a kid and not even knowing what color her hair was.

She had on a funny dress — a little-girl kind of thing with a short skirt with flounces, I guess you call them. It looked familiar, but I couldn't make it. Not until I saw the mask that was lying in the hall, and then I knew. She was dressed like Minnie Mouse. It turned out later they all were — not like Minnie Mouse, but like all the characters in the cartoons. It was that kind of a party — a Disney Christmas party. There were studio drawings all over the walls, and there were little figures of extinct animals and winged ponies holding the lights on the Christmas tree.

She came right to the point. I could see Michaels liked that; some of these women throw a big act and it's an hour before you know what's been stolen. "It's my emeralds and rubies," she said. "They're gone. There are some other pieces missing too, but I don't so much care about them. The emeralds and the rubies are the important thing. You've got to find them."

"Necklaces?" Michaels asked.

"A necklace."

"Of emeralds *and* rubies?" Michaels knows his jewelry. His old man is in the business and tried to bring him up in it, but he joined the force. He knows a thing or two just the same, and his left eyebrow does tricks when he hears or sees something that isn't kosher. It was doing tricks now.

"I know that may sound strange, Lieutenant, but this is no time for discussing the esthetics of jewelry. It struck me once that it would be exciting to have red and green in one necklace, and I had it made. They're perfectly cut and matched, and it could never be duplicated."

Michaels didn't look happy. "You could drape it on a Christmas tree," he said. But Beverly Benson's Christmas tree was a cold white with the little animals holding blue lights.

Those Benson eyes were generally lovely and melting. Now they flashed. "Lieutenant, I summoned you to find my jewelry, not to criticize my taste. If I wanted a cultural opinion, I should hardly consult the police."

"You could do worse," Michaels said. "Now tell us all about it."

She took us into the library. The other men Michaels sent off to guard the exits, even if there wasn't much chance of the thief still sticking around. The Lieutenant told me once, when we were off duty, "Tom," he said, "you're the most useful man in my detail. Some of the others can think, and some of them can act; but there's not a damned one of them can just stand there and look so much like the Law." He's a little guy himself and kind of on the smooth and dapper side; so he keeps me with him to back him up, just standing there.

There wasn't much to what she told us. Just that she was giving this Disney Christmas party, like I said, and it was going along fine. Then late in the evening, when almost everybody had gone home, they got to talking about jewelry. She didn't know who started the talk that way, but there they were. And she told them about the emeralds and rubies.

"Then Fig — Philip Newton, you know — the photographer who does all those marvelous sand dunes and magnolia blossoms and things —" (her

voice went all sort of tender when she mentioned him, and I could see Michaels taking it all in) "Fig said he didn't believe it. He felt the same way you do, Lieutenant, and I'm sure I can't see why. 'It's unworthy of you, darling,' he said. So I laughed and tried to tell him they were really beautiful — for they are, you know — and when he went on scoffing I said, 'All right, then, I'll show you.' So I went into the little dressing room where I keep my jewel box, and they weren't there. And that's all I know."

Then Michaels settled down to questions. When had she last seen the necklace? Was the lock forced? Had there been any prowlers around? What else was missing? And suchlike.

Beverly Benson answered impatiently, like she expected us to just go out there like that and grab the thief and say, "Here you are, lady." She had shown the necklace to another guest early in the party — he'd gone home long ago, but she gave us the name and address to check. No, the lock hadn't been forced. They hadn't seen anything suspicious, either. There were some small things missing, too — a couple of diamond rings, a star sapphire pendant, a pair of pearl earrings — but those didn't worry her so much. It was the emerald and ruby necklace that she wanted.

That left eyebrow went to work while Michaels thought about what she'd said. "If the lock wasn't forced, that lets out a chance prowler. It was somebody who knew you, who'd had a chance to lift your key or take an impression of it. Where'd you keep it?"

"The key? In my handbag usually. Tonight it was in a box on my dressing table."

Michaels sort of groaned. "And women wonder why jewels get stolen! Smith, get Ferguson and have him go over the box for prints. In the meantime, Miss Benson, give me a list of all your guests tonight. We'll take up the servants later. I'm warning you now it's a ten-to-one chance you'll ever see your Christmas tree ornament again unless a fence sings; but we'll do what we can. Then I'll deliver my famous little lecture on safes, and we'll pray for the future."

When I'd seen Ferguson, I waited for Michaels in the room where the guests were. There were only five left, and I didn't know who they were yet. They'd all taken off their masks; but they still had on their cartoon costumes. It felt screwy to sit there among them and think: This is serious, this is a felony, and look at those bright funny costumes.

Donald Duck was sitting by himself, with one hand resting on his long-

billed mask while the other made steady grabs for the cigarette box beside him. His face looked familiar; I thought maybe I'd seen him in bits.

Three of them sat in a group: Mickey Mouse, Snow White, and Dopey. Snow White looked about fourteen at first, and it took you a while to realize she was a woman and a swell one at that. She was a little brunette, slender and cool-looking — a simple real kind of person that didn't seem to belong in a Hollywood crowd. Mickey Mouse was a hefty blond guy about as tall as I am and built like a tackle that could hold any line; but his face didn't go with his body. It was shrewd-like, and what they call sensitive. Dopey looked just that — a nice guy and not too bright.

Then over in another corner was a Little Pig. I don't know do they have names, but this was the one that wears a sailor suit and plays the fiddle. He had bushy hair sticking out from under the sailor cap and long skilful-looking hands stretched in front of him. The fiddle was beside him, but he didn't touch it. He was passed out — dead to the world, close as I could judge.

He and Donald were silent, but the group of three talked a little.

"I guess it didn't work," Dopey said.

"You couldn't help that, Harvey." Snow White's voice was just like I expected — not like Snow White's in the picture, but deep and smooth, like a stream that's running in the shade with moss on its banks. "Even an agent can't cast people."

"You're a swell guy, Madison," Mickey Mouse said. "You tried, and thanks. But if it's no go, hell, it's just no go. It's up to her."

"Miss Benson is surely more valuable to your career." The running stream was ice cold.

Now maybe I haven't got anything else that'd make me a good detective, but I do have curiosity, and here's where I saw a way to satisfy it. I spoke to all of them and I said, "I'd better take down some information while we're waiting for the Lieutenant." I started on Donald Duck. "Name?"

"Daniel Wappingham." The voice was English. I could tell that much. I don't have such a good ear for stuff like that, but I thought maybe it wasn't the best English.

"Occupation?"

"Actor."

And I took down the address and the rest of it. Then I turned to the drunk and shook him. He woke up part way but he didn't hear what I was saying. He just threw his head back and said loudly, "Waltzes! Ha!" and

went under again. His voice was gutteral — some kind of German, I guessed. I let it go at that and went over to the three.

Dopey's name was Harvey Madison; occupation, actor's representative — tenpercenter to you. Mickey Mouse was Philip Newton; occupation, photographer. (That was the guy Beverly Benson mentioned, the one she sounded thataway about.) And Snow White was Jane Newton.

"Any relation?" I asked.

"Yes and no," she said, so soft I could hardly hear her.

"Mrs. Newton," Mickey Mouse stated, "was once my wife." And the silence was so strong you could taste it.

I got it then. The two of them sitting there, remembering all the little things of their life together, being close to each other and yet somehow held apart. And on Christmas, too, when you remember things. There was still something between them even if they didn't admit it themselves. But Beverly Benson seemed to have a piece of the man, and where did Dopey fit in?

It sort of worried me. They looked like swell people — people that belonged together. But it was my job to worry about the necklace and not about people's troubles. I was glad Michaels came in just then.

He was being polite at the moment, explaining to Beverly Benson how Ferguson hadn't got anywheres with the prints and how the jewels were probably miles away by now. "But we'll do what we can," he said. "We'll talk to these people and find out what's possible. I doubt, however, if you'll ever see that necklace again. It was insured, of course, Miss Benson?"

"Of course. So were the other things, and with them I don't mind. But this necklace I couldn't conceivably duplicate, Lieutenant."

Just then Michael's eye lit on Donald Duck, and the eyebrow did tricks worth putting in a cartoon. "We'll take you one by one," he said. "You with the tail-feathers, we'll start with you. Come along, Smith."

Donald Duck grabbed a fresh cigarette, thought a minute, then reached out again for a handful. He whistled off key and followed us into the library.

"I gave all the material to your stooge here, Lieutenant," he began. "Name, Wappingham. Occupation, actor. Address ——"

Michaels was getting so polite it had me bothered. "You won't mind, sir," he purred, "if I suggest a few corrections in your statement?"

Donald looked worried. "Don't you think I know my own name?"

"Possibly. But would you mind if I altered the statement to read: Name,

Alfred Higgins. Occupation, jewel thief — conceivably reformed?"

The Duck wasn't so bad hit as you might have thought. He let out a pretty fair laugh and said, "So the fat's in the fire at last. But I'm glad you concede the possibility of my having reformed."

"The possibility, yes." Michaels underlined the word. "You admit you're Higgins?"

"Why not? You can't blame me for not telling you right off; it wouldn't look good when somebody had just been up to my old tricks. But now that you know —— And by the way, Lieutenant, just how do you know?"

"Some bright boy at Scotland Yard spotted you in an American picture. Sent your description and record out to us just in case you ever took up your career again."

"Considerate of him, wasn't it?"

But Michaels wasn't in a mood for bright chatter any longer. We got down to work. We stripped that duck costume off the actor and left him shivering while we went over it inch by inch. He didn't like it much.

At last Michaels let him get dressed again. "You came in your car?"

"Yes."

"You're going home in a taxi. We could hold you on suspicion, but I'd sooner play it this way."

"Now I understand," Donald said, "what they mean by the high-handed American police procedure." And he went back into the other room with us.

All the same that was a smart move of Michaels'. It meant that Wappingham-Higgins-Duck would either have to give up all hope of the jewels (he certainly didn't have them on him) or lead us straight to them, because of course I knew a tail would follow that taxi and camp on his doorstep all next week if need be.

Donald Duck said goodnight to his hostess and nodded to the other guests. Then he picked up his mask.

"Just a minute," Michaels said. "Let's have a look at that."

"At this?" he asked innocent-like and backed toward the French window. Then he was standing there with an automatic in his hand. It was little but damned nasty-looking. I never thought what a good holster that long bill would make.

"Stay where you are, gentlemen," he said calmly. "I'm leaving undisturbed, *if* you don't mind."

The room was frozen still. Beverly Benson and Snow White let out little gasps of terror. The drunk was still dead to the world. The other two men looked at us and did nothing. It was Donald's round.

Or would've been if I hadn't played football in high school. It was a crazy chance, but I took it. I was the closest to him, only his eyes were on Michaels. It was a good flying tackle and it brought him to the ground in a heap consisting mostly of me. The mask smashed as we rolled over on it and I saw bright glitters pouring out.

Ferguson and O'Hara were there by now. One of them picked up his gun and the other snapped on the handcuffs. I got to my feet and turned to Michaels and Beverly Benson. They began to say things both at once about what a swell thing I'd done and then I keeled over.

When I came to I was on a couch in a little dark room. I learned later it was the dressing room where the necklace had been stolen. Somebody was bathing my arm and sobbing.

I sort of half sat up and said, "Where am I?" I always thought it was just in stories people said that, but it was the first thing popped into my mind.

"You're all right," a cool voice told me. "It's only a flesh wound."

"And I didn't feel a thing. . . . You mean he winged me?"

"I guess that's what you call it. When I told the Lieutenant I was a nurse he said I could fix you up and they wouldn't need the ambulance. You're all right now." Her voice was shaky in the dark, but I knew it was Snow White.

"Well, anyways, that broke the case pretty quick."

"But it didn't." And she explained: Donald had been up to his old tricks, all right; but what he had hidden in his bill was the diamonds and the sapphire and the pearl earrings, only no emerald and ruby necklace. Beverly Benson was wild, and Michaels and our men were combing the house from top to bottom to see where he'd stashed it.

"There," she said. She finished the story and the bandaging at the same time. "Can you stand up all right now?"

I was still kind of punchy. Nothing else could excuse me for what I said next. But she was so sweet and tender and good I wanted to say something nice, so like a dumb jerk I up and said, "You'd make some man a grand wife."

That was what got her. She just went to pieces — dissolved, you might say. I'm not used to tears on the shoulder of my uniform, but what could I

do? I didn't try to say anything — just patted her back and let her talk. And I learned all about it.

How she'd married Philip Newton back in '29 when he was a promising young architect and she was an heiress just out of finishing school. How the fortune she was heiress to went fooey like all the others and her father took the quick way out. How the architect business went all to hell with no building going on and just when things were worst she had a baby. And then how Philip started drinking, and finally — Well, anyways, there it was.

They'd both pulled themselves together now. She was making enough as a nurse to keep the kid (she was too proud to take alimony), and Philip was doing fine in this arty photographic line he'd taken up. A Newton photograph was The Thing to Have in the smart Hollywood set. But they couldn't come together again, not while he was such a success. If she went to him, he'd think she was begging; if he came to her, she'd think he was being noble. And Beverly Benson had set her cap for him.

Then this agent Harvey Madison (that's Dopey), who had known them both when, decided to try and fix things. He brought Snow White to this party; neither of them knew the other would be here. And it was a party and it was Christmas, and some of their happiest memories were Christmases together. I guess that's pretty much true of everybody. So she felt everything all over again, only —

"You don't know what it's done for me to tell you this. Please don't feel hurt; but in that uniform and everything you don't seem quite like a person. I can talk and feel free. And this has been hurting me all night and I had to say it."

I wanted to take the two of them and knock their heads together; only first off I had to find that emerald and ruby necklace. It isn't my job to heal broken hearts. I was feeling O.K. now, so we went back to the others.

Only they weren't there. There wasn't anybody in the room but only the drunk. I guessed where Mickey and Dopey were: stripped and being searched.

"Who's that?" I asked Snow White.

She looked at the Little Pig. "Poor fellow. He's been going through torture tonight too. That's Bela Strauss."

"Bella's a woman's name."

"He's part Hungarian." (I guess that might explain anything.) "He

comes from Vienna. They brought him out here to write music for pictures because his name is Strauss. But he's a very serious composer — you know, like . . ." and she said some tongue twisters that didn't mean anything to me. "They think because his name is Strauss he can write all sorts of pretty dance tunes, and they won't let him write anything else. It's made him all twisted and unhappy, and he drinks too much."

"I can see that." I walked over and shook him. The sailor cap fell off. He stirred and looked up at me. I think it was the uniform that got him. He sat up sharp and said something in I guess German. Then he thought around a while and found some words in English.

"Why are you here? Why the po-lice?" It came out in little one-syllable lumps, like he had to hunt hard for each sound.

I told him. I tried to make it simple, but that wasn't easy. Snow White knew a little German, so she helped.

"Ach!" he sighed. "And I through it all slept!"

"That's one word for it," I said.

"But this thief of jewels — him I have seen."

It was a sweet job to get it out of him, but it boiled down to this: Where he passed out was on that same couch where they took me — right in the dressing-room. He came to once when he heard somebody in there, and he saw the person take something out of a box. Something red and green.

"Who was it?"

"The face, you understand, I do not see it. But the costume, yes. I see that clear. It was Mikki Maus." It sounded funny to hear something as American as Mickey Mouse in an accent like that.

It took Snow White a couple of seconds to realize who wore the Mickey Mouse outfit. Then she said "Philip" and fainted.

Officer Tom Smith laid down his manuscript. "That's all, Mr. Quilter."

"All, sir?"

"When Michaels came in, I told him. He figured Newton must've got away with the necklace and then the English crook made his try later and got the other stuff. They didn't find the necklace anywheres; but he must've pulled a fast one and stashed it away some place. With direct evidence like that, what can you do? They're holding him."

"And you chose, sir, not to end your story on that note of finality?"

"I couldn't, Mr. Quilter. I . . . I like that girl who was Snow White.

I want to see the two of them together again and I'd sooner he was innocent. And besides, when we were leaving, Beverly Benson caught me alone. She said, 'I can't talk to your Lieutenant. He is *not* sympathetic. But you . . .'" Tom Smith almost blushed. "So she went on about how certain she was that Newton was innocent and begged me to help her prove it. So I promised."

"Hm," said Mr. Quilter. "Your problem, sir, is simple. You have good human values there in your story. Now we must round them out properly. And the solution is simple. We have two women in love with the hero, one highly sympathetic and the other less so; for the spectacle of a *passée* actress pursuing a new celebrity is not a pleasant one. This less sympathetic woman, to please the audience, must redeem herself with a gesture of self-immolation to secure the hero's happiness with the heroine. Therefore, sir, let her confess to the robbery."

"Confess to the . . . But Mr. Quilter, that makes a different story out of it. I'm trying to write as close as I can to what happened. And I promised —"

"Damme, sir, it's obvious. She did steal the necklace herself. She hasn't worked for years. She must need money. You mentioned insurance. The necklace was probably pawned long ago, and now she is trying to collect."

"But that won't work. It really was stolen. Somebody saw it earlier in the evening, and the search didn't locate it. And believe me, that squad knows how to search."

"Fiddle-faddle, sir." Mr. Quilter's close-cropped scalp was beginning to twitch. "What was seen must have been a paste imitation. She could dissolve that readily in acid and dispose of it down the plumbing. And Wappingham's presence makes her plot doubly sure; she knew him for what he was, and invited him as a scapegoat."

Tom Smith squirmed. "I'd almost think you were right, Mr. Quilter. Only Bela Strauss did see Newton take the necklace."

Mr. Quilter laughed. "If that is all that perturbs you . . ." He rose to his feet. "Come with me, sir. One of my neighbors is a Viennese writer now acting as a reader in German for Metropolis. He is also new in this country; his cultural background is identical with Strauss's. Come. But first we must step down to the corner drugstore and purchase what I believe is termed a comic book."

Mr. Quilter, his eyes agleam, hardly apologized for their intrusion into

the home of the Viennese writer. He simply pointed at a picture in the comic book and demanded, "Tell me, sir. What character is that?"

The bemused Viennese smiled. "Why, that is Mikki Maus."

Mr. Quilter's finger rested on a pert little drawing of Minnie.

Philip Newton sat in the cold jail cell, but he was oblivious of the cold. He was holding his wife's hands through the bars and she was saying, "I could come to you now, dear, where I couldn't before. Then you might have thought it was just because you were successful, but now I can tell you how much I love you and need you — need you even when you're in disgrace. . . ."

They were kissing through the bars when Michaels came with the good news. "She's admitted it, all right. It was just the way Smith reconstructed it. She'd destroyed the paste replica and was trying to use us to pull off an insurance frame. She cracked when we had Strauss point out a picture of what he called 'Mikki Maus.' So you're free again, Newton. How's that for a Christmas present?"

"I've got a better one, officer. We're getting married again."

"You wouldn't need a new wedding ring, would you?" Michaels asked with filial devotion. "Michaels, Fifth between Spring and Broadway — fine stock."

Mr. Quilter laid down the final draft of Tom Smith's story, complete now with ending, and fixed the officer with a reproachful gaze. "You omitted, sir, the explanation of why such a misunderstanding should arise."

Tom Smith shifted uncomfortably. "I'm afraid, Mr. Quilter, I couldn't remember all that straight."

"It is simple. The noun *Maus* in German is of feminine gender. Therefore a *Mikki Maus* is a female. The male, naturally, is a *Mikki Mäuserich.* I recall a delightful Viennese song of some seasons ago, which we once employed as background music, wherein the singer declares that he and his beloved will be forever paired, '*wie die Mikki Mikki Mikki Mikki Mikki Maus und der Mikki Mäuserich.*' "

"Gosh," said Tom Smith. "You know a lot of things."

Mr. Quilter allowed himself to beam. "Between us, sir, there should be little that we do not know."

"We sure make a swell team as a detective."

The beam faded. "As a detective? Damme, sir, do you think I cared about your robbery? I simply explained the inevitable dénouement to this story."

"But she didn't confess and make a gesture. Michaels had to prove it on her."

"All the better, sir. That makes her mysterious and deep. A Bette Davis role. I think we will first try for a magazine sale on this. Studios are more impressed by matter already in print. Then I shall show it to F. X., and we shall watch the squirmings of that genius Aram Melekian."

Tom Smith looked out the window, frowning. They made a team, all right; but which way? He still itched to write, but the promotion Michaels had promised him sounded good, too. Were he and this strange lean old man a team for writing or for detection?

The friendly red and green lights of the neighborhood Christmas trees seemed an equally good omen either way.

A MINUTE MYSTERY

The Case of the Egyptian Vase *by Roy Post and Austin Ripley*

"Know anything about Egyptology?" George Caldwell asked as he dropped into a comfortable chair in the Professor's study.

"Very little," replied Fordney cautiously. "My knowledge of the fascinating subject is extremely limited. Why do you ask? I didn't know you went in for things of the Orient."

"I don't, as a rule," replied the antique collector. "But recently I've become interested in tear vases. Well, the other day quite an ignorant fellow who said he had heard of my interest, brought me this." Caldwell produced an exquisitely fashioned small tear vase. "And this." He handed Fordney a parchment written in Arabic.

"The man said that parchment was written by an Egyptian scholar in Cairo. I've had it translated and it states that this vase was found in the grave of princess Ulami Zazola whose reign from 452 to 454 B.C. was terminated by death at the hands of her sister, Zhadora."

The Professor studied the beautiful little piece of pottery under a glass for several minutes in silence. Finally:

"She had a notably short reign, didn't she? How did the man who offered you this come by it?"

"Said he picked it up in Cairo last year from the scholar who wrote the parchment."

"Why didn't you take both to the Strickler Museum for an opinion?"

Caldwell grinned: "Didn't want old Lefingwell there to know I'd been taken in if it isn't genuine."

Fordney studied the parchment again.

"You mean you bought it?" he queried.

"Yes. Was I hoaxed?"

What do you think the Professor replied? What is the clue to his answer?

Solution

Indeed was George Caldwell hoaxed! B.C. dates are expressed in reverse manner to those of A.D. Had the document been genuine the parchment would have read: "whose reign from 454 to 452, etc."

A parody in literature is a humorous imitation, deliberately fashioned, of a serious work. One of the best-known of modern detective novels is "Gaudy Night," by Dorothy L. Sayers. Here is a clever — a brilliantly clever — parody of "Gaudy Night" by one of the most eminent detective-story writers of our time, E. C. Bentley, author of "Trent's Last Case" notably, and other distinguished works. Readers of "Gaudy Night" will recognize with delight some of the characters and scenes in that book. On the other hand, those unfamiliar with the original will still find "Greedy Night" a joy, since Mr. Bentley not only uses Lord Peter Wimsey himself as the detective, but has also contrived what the editors consider the best parody-plot within their ken.

GREEDY NIGHT

A Parody

by E. C. BENTLEY

"Yow ow ow," observed Lord Peter Wimsey, opening his eyes; then, reclosing and feebly knuckling them, "Ow wow. Yah ah ow."

"Very good, my lord," his servant said, as he drew the curtains of the bedroom. "It is now twelve o'clock noon, my lord. At what hour would your lordship take breakfast?"

"Zero hour," Lord Peter snarled. "Take the nasty breakfast away, I don't want any breakfast today. Oh, Lord! Bunter, why did I drink all that Corton Clos du Roi 1904 on the top of a quart of Archdeacon ale last night? I'm old enough to know better. Anyhow, my inside is."

"If I may make the suggestion, my lord, it may have been what your lordship had after coming home that is at the root of the trouble."

Wimsey sat up in bed wild-eyed. "Bunter!" he gasped. "Don't tell me I had whisky as well."

"No, my lord. That may possibly have been your lordship's intention; but I fear that what your lordship actually drank, in a moment of absent-mindedness, was a mixture of furniture-polish and Vichy water. I found the empty bottles on the floor this morning, my lord."

Wimsey sank back with a moan; then rallied himself and swallowed a little tea from the cup which Bunter had filled.

"I don't like this tea," he said peevishly. "I don't believe this is my specially grown Son-of-Heaven china."

"It is, my lord; but in some circumstances the flavour of almost anything is apt to be sensibly impaired. May I urge, my lord, that an effort should be made to eat some breakfast? It is considered to be advisable on the morning after an occasion of festivity."

"Oh, all right." Wimsey held out his hand for the menu which Bunter produced, like a conjuror, apparently from the air. "Well, I won't eat *avoine secoueur*, anyhow. Give it to the cat."

"The cat has already tried it, my lord, during my momentary absence from the kitchen. The intelligent animal appears to be of your lordship's opinion. I would recommend a little *pâte gonfleur sur canapé*, my lord, for the present emergency."

Wimsey groaned. "I don't believe I could taste even that," he said. "Very well, I'll have a stab at it."

"Thank you, my lord." Bunter laid an armful of newspapers on the bed and withdrew. When he returned with the breakfast tray Wimsey was reading with absorbed interest. "Bunter," he said eagerly, "I see that at Sotheby's on Monday they're auctioning a thing I simply must have — the original manuscript of the Chanson de Roland, with marginal notes by Saint Louis. If I find I can't go myself, I shall want you to pop round and bid for me. That is, of course, if it's the genuine article. You could make sure of that, I suppose?"

"Without difficulty, my lord. I have always taken an interest in the technical study of mediaeval calligraphy. I should be sceptical, though, about those marginal notes, my lord. It has always been understood, your lordship, that His Most Christian Majesty was unable to write. However —"

At this point there came a long-continued ringing at the door-bell of the flat; and after a brief interval Bunter, with all the appearance of acting under protest, showed the Bishop of Glastonbury into the bedroom.

"I say, Peter, there's the dickens to pay!" exclaimed that prelate. "Topsy's pretty well off her onion, and Bill Mixer's in a frightful dither. Have you heard what's happened? But, of course, you couldn't. They've been trying to get you on the 'phone this morning, but that man of yours kept on saying that he feared his lordship was somewhat closely engaged at the moment. So they rang me up, and asked me to tell you."

"Well, why not tell me?" Wimsey snapped. Topsy, the Bishop's favourite sister, was an old friend, and her husband was a man for whom Wimsey had a deep regard that dated from his years at Balliol.

"Dermot's dead."

"I say! What a ghastly thing!" Wimsey scrambled out of bed and into a dressing-gown. "What happened to poor old Dermot?"

"That's just what they don't know. There was absolutely nothing the matter with him, but he was found dead this morning — apparently uninjured, they say. Foul play is suspected, of course."

"Of course," Wimsey agreed, plying his hair-brushes vigorously.

"And Topsy and Bill would like you, if you can, to go down for the week-end —"

"Up," Wimsey murmured.

"All right, up for the week-end," said the Bishop a little testily. "And see what you can do to clear the mystery up, or down, or any dashed way you like."

Wimsey rang the bell, and Bunter instantly appeared. "Oh, look here, Bunter, will you get the German Ambassador on the 'phone for me?" As Bunter busied himself with the instrument by the bedside, Wimsey turned to the Bishop again. "Well, Mike, I will certainly go if they want me. I shall drive there in the Fendlair, so it won't take long."

The Bishop repressed a shudder. "Why do you amateur detectives always drive like lunatics?" he asked plaintively. "You all do — except Trent, of course; he never does anything off-colour. Well, they'll be glad of your help — if you get there in one piece, that is — and I'm grateful to you myself. I must push off now — got to move the second reading of the Disestablishment Bill in the Lords this afternoon, and I haven't prepared a line of my stuff yet."

As the Bishop disappeared, Bunter presented the telephone receiver to Wimsey on a salver. "His Excellency is now at the apparatus, my lord."

"Hullo, is that Bodo?" Wimsey cried. "Yes, Peter speaking. Heil Hitler. I say, old man, I'm frightfully sorry, but I can't turn up at your squash this evening. I've just heard some very bad news. . . . No, Heil Hitler, it's nobody you know. . . . Yes, Heil Hitler, very serious. I mean, dead, and all that. I've got to go and see about it. . . . That's kind of you, Bodo. You know I value your sympathy. Thanks hunderttausendmal. Well, Heil Hitler, good-bye."

During the progress of his toilet, Wimsey cancelled by telephone, with all apologies due, several other appointments. A Sunday luncheon of the Food and Wine Society at Tewkesbury, to test the quality — so praised by

Falstaff — of the local mustard. A meeting of the Committee of the Anerithmon Gelasma Yacht Club, called for the purpose of blackballing the Duke of Cheshire. A supper for Miss Ruth Draper, who would give, it was hoped, her impersonation of the Nine Muses discussing the character of Aphrodite.

Wimsey then got into communication with the Spoopendyke Professor of Egyptology in the University of Oxford, and accepted in brief but sympathetic terms his invitation to spend the week-end. Professor Mixer was greatly relieved, he said. He feared that Wimsey must have sacrificed other engagements in order to do Topsy and himself this kindness.

Wimsey burdened his soul with the statement that he had been going to spend the next few days in bringing the catalogue of his library up to date; a thing which could be done at any time.

The Professor of Egyptology met Wimsey at the door of his grey old house of Headington stone, nearly facing the main gateway of Janus. He greeted his visitor with subdued cordiality, his left hand clutching his unkempt beard as he talked.

"It's very good of you to come, Peter," he said. "Topsy was anxious to have your opinion, and we are very glad to have you with us, anyhow. But whatever you may find out about the cause of death, you can't bring back poor Dermot. I thought it better you should stay in college, if you don't mind. This is a house of sorrow, you see; and you would really be more comfortable in Janus. I've got you rooms in the Fellows' Quad — Simpson's — he is in the Morea just now. You only want to be careful not to disturb the manuscript of his forthcoming book on the pre-Minoan cultures of the Dodecanese. He has a habit of doing all his writing on the backs of old envelopes, and leaving them all over the floor. So perhaps you'd better not use the study — you might prefer not to in any case, because of course it can't ever be dusted on account of the envelopes — hasn't been for years."

"I shall love staying in Janus," said Wimsey. "It's a college I was very seldom in when I was up, and the only experience I had of the Fellows' Quad was when Jinks was Proctor, and I had to go to his rooms there to see him about my chaining a gorilla to the railings of the Martyrs' Memorial."

"Ha! H'm! Just so," said the Professor. "Perhaps you would like to see the body at once. It is still there, lying just as it was found — in the library."

"Well, naturally," Wimsey said with impatience. "Where did you think I thought it was? — in the scullery? Yes, I should like to see it now."

The Professor led the way to the library, a large, light room on the ground floor, walled with crowded shelves, and smelling slightly of mummified cats. Before the central window was a large writing-table covered with piles of papers in orderly array. On the blotter, Wimsey noted with interest, a very modern book lay open with a part of one of its leaves torn away — a detective story which had murdered sleep for countless readers.

The body lay on the carpet beside the table. Wimsey, mastering the emotion that seized him, knelt down and looked closely at the stocky, well-knit figure, still carefully neat in appearance as Dermot always was in life, and in a natural posture, but that the feet were somewhat drawn up. Those keen eyes were closed now, the mouth too was shut, and there was not a trace of expression on the small, aquiline features. No blood was to be seen, and there was, as Wimsey soon ascertained, no sign of any wound on the body.

Dermot had been in perfect health and excellent spirits up to the time of his death, Professor Mixer said. He himself had been the last to see him alive — at about half-past nine o'clock that morning, when they had exchanged a few words in this same room before the Professor went out to Blackwell's in quest of a book. Shortly after that his wife, passing the door of the library, had heard Dermot swearing violently within, but she had thought nothing of that.

"You remember, Peter," the Professor said, "how rough his language often was. He picked up the habit during his time in the mercantile marine, and he seemed quite unable to break himself of it. Topsy, you know, rather admired it really, and I never paid any attention to it; but it cost us the services of an excellent cook, a strict Wesleyan, and sometimes I felt rather uncomfortable about it when I was seeing pupils here."

"Do you think he could have taught them anything?" Wimsey asked.

"I fear so — yes. I mean, I hope so," said the Professor with a melancholy shake of the head. "Only last week Lord Torquilstone brought me an essay, and as soon as he entered the room Dermot called out — well, I cannot bring myself to repeat what he said. It was as essentially meaningless as it was deplorably coarse, and Torquilstone was quite taken aback. Then there was another time, when the Vice-Chancellor came to tea with us. We were in the drawing-room upstairs, but I am afraid that he distinctly heard Dermot, who was in this room, blaspheming in the most dreadful terms. In fact, Hoggarty must have heard, because he dropped a piece of muffin

into his tea, and then remarked upon the lovely weather that we were having — which was not the case, for it was pouring with rain and very cold for the time of year. I fear I shall be getting quite a bad name in the Hebdomadal Council."

"And was that — I mean what Topsy heard — the last evidence of his being alive?"

"Yes. It is painful," the Professor said, "to think that those were in all probability his last words; for I came in about half an hour later, and found him as you see."

Dinner with Professor Mixer and his wife that evening was not a cheerful affair. Topsy, pale and red-eyed, strangled a sob from time to time, and made hardly a pretence of eating. Her husband, too, could do no more than peck feebly at a half-raw cutlet, while his talk (about the funerary customs which grew up under the Kyksos dynasty) had little of its customary sparkle.

Wimsey, on the other hand, urged on by some impulse which he could neither understand nor control, ate enough of the repulsive meal for all three, while yet he shuddered to think of the probable consequences. He sketched in fancy a lyrical dialogue between himself and his digestion.

> "Know'st thou not me?" the deep voice cried.
> "So long enjoyed, so oft misused;
> Alternate, in thy fickle pride,
> Extolled, neglected and accused . . ."

At length he took himself away, and retired to his sitting-room in college to think over all that he had learned from the Professor before dinner-time, and from his interrogation of Topsy and the servants. The case baffled him.

He sat at his window on the first floor, looking out, in the gathering gloom, upon the velvet lawn and the stately background of fifteenth-century architecture, pierced just opposite his place of observation by a broad, low-pointed archway through which a section of the Front Quad could be faintly discerned. The Aquinas Club, he had been told, were holding their annual dinner that night, by invitation of the Fellows, in the Senior Common Room, and for some time past their proceedings, which were fully choral, had claimed his attention. He heard the tremendous burden of "On Ilkley Moor Baat 'At," the stirring swing of "Auprès de la Blonde," the complex cadences of "Green Grow the Rashes Oh!" the noble organ-

music of "Slattery's Mounted Foot," the crashing staccato of "Still His Whiskers Grew," the solemn keening of "The Typist's Farewell." Once there were indications that a Rhodes Scholar was trying, with as little success as usually waits on his countrymen's efforts in that direction, to remember the words of his own national anthem.

Then there fell a hush; and it was not until half an hour later that Wimsey's wrestling with his problem was disturbed by new sounds of academic liveliness in the Front Quad. He gazed expectantly towards the great archway, and presently a slight, pyjamaed figure fled across the darksome frame of vision, pursued by a loose group of obscurer shapes, dimly seen to be white-shirted, and quite plainly heard to yell. Wimsey sighed. The luxurious, self-conscious melancholy of those no longer ridiculously young, but having — with any luck — half a lifetime still before them, possessed him. Elbows on sill, chin in hands, he gazed into the now untenanted gloom, recalling lost binges of old years.

A little later the moon peered out from her curtains of cloud, and Wimsey, finding that his mood demanded some further recapturing of the spirit of a college by night, descended into the Quad and set out on a voyage of discovery. In the wall to his left hand an opening that looked like the doorway to a staircase of rooms, such as he had just quitted, turned out to be the archway of a vaulted passage leading into a tiny square of stone, whose small grated windows and peaked turret recalled one of Doré's visions of the Paris of Rabelais. From this another entry led to another Quad, of normal size, and thence again he passed to one yet larger, which he could recognize by the battlements on the farther wall as Pateshull Quad.

As Wimsey stood at gaze, imagining what study, what talk, or possibly what *chemin-de-fer*, might be in progress behind the few windows that still showed lights within, a young man emerged from one of the staircase entries. He was white-shirted, his hair was somewhat disordered, and he carried under one arm an enormous book. This he took to the centre of the gravelled space, then placed it carefully on the ground, and sat upon it. Soon his wandering eye caught sight of Wimsey in the moonlight, and the two inspected one another in silence for some moments. Then the keen instinct of youth told the sitter that the figure before him, slender though it was, must be that of someone of thirty at least, and with instant deference to age and infirmity he rose and waved a hand towards the obese volume on the gravel.

"Won't you sit down, sir?" he said. "Not enough room for two, I'm afraid, even on Liddell and Scott."

"Thanks, I'd rather not," Wimsey said. "I'm staying in your Fellows' Quad, and I just came out for a stroll before turning in. You have been at the Aquinas dinner, perhaps?"

"Yes," said the young man. "It was rather progressive, as a dinner — sort of thing makes you feel a trifle listless afterwards — so, if you're sure you won't —" He subsided upon his lexicon, then went on: "Young Warlock got it up his nose rather, you see, and went to sleep on the sofa, so we carried him to his rooms and put him to bed. Then the little devil woke up suddenly and got loose, and we had to chase him all over the college before we could get him bedded down again. Now I'm just sitting here for rest and meditation. D'you ever meditate?"

"Oh, often," said Wimsey. "What were you thinking of meditating upon this time?"

"Housman's edition of Manilius," the young man answered, abstractedly removing his collar and tie. "Wonderful chap — Housman, I mean; Manilius was rather a blister. The way Housman pastes the other commentators in the slats does your heart good. I was just concentrating on the way he kicks the stuffing out of Elias Stöber — lovely!"

"Well, I won't interrupt you," Wimsey said. "I'm thinking something over myself, as a matter of fact."

"All right, go to it," the young man said amiably; then, lifting up his voice in an agreeable baritone, "I never envy a-a-anyone when I'm thinking . . . thinking . . . thinking. . . . I say," he added, "who are you? I'm Mitchell, named Bryan Farrant by my innocent parents; so of course I'm never called anything but B.F."

"Hard luck! My name's Wimsey."

"Not Lord Peter?"

"Yes."

"Sinful Solomon!" exclaimed the young man. "Here, you simply must confer distinction on my lexicon. I'll have the cover you sat on framed."

"No, really," Wimsey laughed, "I must go. But do you and your friends really read the chronicles of my misspent life, then?"

"I should say we do read them!" cried Mr. Mitchell. "We eat them!"

"How jolly for you — I mean for me — that is to say, for her — oh well, you know what I mean," Wimsey said distractedly.

"I suppose I do, if you say so," said Mr. Mitchell without conviction. "You know the lyric there is about you?

Lord Peter Wimsey
May look a little flimsy.
But he's simply sublime
When nosing out a crime."

"No, I hadn't heard it," Wimsey said. "It's nice to be sublime, anyhow. Well, here I go. Good night."

"Sweet dreams!" said Mr. Mitchell.

On the Sunday morning Wimsey awoke with that indescribable feeling that something has happened, but one does not know quite what. Mr. Mitchell's parting wish had been not too exactly fulfilled. Wimsey had dreamed of having his head bitten off by a crocodile, after which he had attended a Yorkshire farmers' market-day ordinary, and then, in the character of a missionary, had been chased by a cassowary over the plains of Timbuctoo.

He arose unrefreshed. From his bedroom window he perceived a College servant approaching the entrance to his staircase. The hour being no later than seven o'clock, the scout, who was in his shirtsleeves, had a broom over his left shoulder, a teapot in his right hand, an old cap on back to front, and a cigarette behind one of his ears. He was eating.

"What would Bunter say? Perish Bunter!" mused Wimsey ungratefully. "I am in the arms of Alma Mater once more, and this — this is one of the conditions of her kindness. I wonder what that scout is eating. I never saw Bunter eat. Perhaps he never does — it's a low habit, eating."

Eating! The term recurred again and again to Wimsey's mind as he prepared himself for the facing of another day. What was it that was trying to force itself into the realm of consciousness?

An hour later, the scout, looking now much less like a hangman's assistant, set out for him that Oxford breakfast whose origin is not to be descried through the mists of ages — coffee, scrambled eggs and bacon, toast, butter, marmalade. "And a jolly good breakfast too!" Wimsey reflected. "What was good enough for Duns Scotus and St. Edmund, Roger Bacon and More, Erasmus and Bodley, is good enough for me. And in this holy city I seem always to be hungry. How I always eat at Oxford!"

There again! Back came his mind to eating, though all the year round he would breakfast without a moment's thought for the alimentary process.

Suddenly Wimsey thrust back his chair from the table. "My dream!" he cried hoarsely, striking his forehead with his hand, which at the moment was holding a spoon filled with marmalade. "Eating! That was the concept which the Unknown I was pushing at the Conscious Me! What did young B.F. say? They eat them!"

Wimsey dashed impetuously from the room.

Scene: The library at the Spoopendyke Professor's house. Present: Topsy, her husband, Lord Peter Wimsey and the corpse. Armed with a letter-opener taken from the writing-table, Wimsey knelt beside all that was mortal of Dermot, and gently pried apart the firm-set jaws. From the open mouth he drew forth a piece of printed paper, and smoothed it out upon the table-top beside the novel that still lay there, open at a page of which a part had been torn away. In silence he fitted the scrap into its place in the mutilated page, then pointed to the title at its head.

"*Strong poison!*" he said in a low voice. "Too strong indeed for poor Dermot. Such is the magic of that incisive, compelling style that even the very printed word is saturated with the essence of what it imparts. Others eat her works in a figurative sense only; Dermot began to eat this one in truth and in fact, and so rushed, all unknowingly, to his doom."

Topsy burst into tears. "Uh! Uh! Uh!" she said. "Why did you leave the bub-bub-book about, Bill? You knew he never could resist an open book."

"But how was I to know the story was such a powerful one?" the Professor groaned. "I am no judge of any literature later than 1300 B.C."

Wimsey stood with bowed head. "You have one small consolation," he said, laying a hand on Topsy's shoulder. "Death must have been instantaneous. Dear old Dermot!" he mused. "He was a priceless old bird."

"Well, not exactly priceless," the Professor said with academic care for the niceties of expression. "Topsy bought him in Caledonian Market for three pounds, including the cage."

"You ought to have put him bub-bub-back in it when you went out," Topsy sobbed.

"I know. I shall never forgive myself," said the Professor dismally. "I did think of it, in fact, but when I suggested it Dermot cursed me so frightfully that I left him at liberty."

"He was chu-chu-cheap at the money," Topsy howled. "When once I had heard him sus-sus-swear I would have gone to a fuf-fuf-fiver. I had never heard anything lul-lul-like it."

"No! Hadn't you though?" Wimsey was interested. "And you were at Somerville, too."

A MINUTE MYSTERY

The Case of the Crated Corpse *by Roy Post and Austin Ripley*

"I declare I don't know what Arthur Tuft's thinkin' of to allow that wife of his to make a fool of herself with Joel Craig," declared village storekeeper Alma Grebb.

"Arthur Tuft is a powerful patient man," agreed Janice Moon.

* * *

Three weeks later, in response to a telephone call, County Coroner, Dr. Spence Munger, and Professor Fordney drove to Arthur Tuft's riverside shack.

"I was fishin' up in the bay this mornin'," Tuft said, "when I see an old crate afloatin' and pulled it ashore. My Bessie was inside it. When I reported her amissin' two weeks ago I never thought nothin' like this would happen. I just reckoned she and Joel had gone away together."

Dr. Munger examined the body, horribly bloated and decomposed by water.

"She's been in the water a good two weeks, but she was strangled first," he stated. "I . . . Say, Arthur, isn't this crate made from the same kind of lumber Joel Craig uses to make those big honey crates of his? Of course it is!"

"I was thinkin' so, too," Tuft answered, "but Joel wouldn't do nothin' like this."

* * *

"Well, Professor, here's a case that won't give you much trouble," Munger remarked as they examined Joel Craig's lumber pile. "He left here the day Bessie disappeared. Tired of her, I suppose. That crate was made from this lumber — and he's the *only* one hereabouts who uses this kind!"

"Yes. Quite a simple affair, doctor," Fordney agreed as Craig, carrying two heavy suitcases came into view.

All three men were stunned with surprise when the Professor pointed, said, "*You* are under arrest for Bessie Tuft's murder!"

What single clue caused Fordney to arrest* whom *for the crime?

Solution

The Professor arrested Bessie's husband, Arthur. The body was decomposed by WATER; had been IN water, Dr. Munger said, for two weeks. Yet Tuft said he found the crate FLOATING! But, as enough water had entered the crate to bloat and decompose the body it could not possibly have been FLOATING after two weeks; it would have SUNK.

Knowing of his wife's affair, Arthur Tuft bided his time. When he learned Craig was leaving for a business trip, he strangled Bessie, got lumber from Craig's place (so as to incriminate him), sunk the crate in a secluded spot, and then, on the day Craig was to return, "found it floating." He was hanged.

The familiar theme of the man-hunter and his quarry, always a fascinating subject for detective fiction, is here given a refreshingly sympathetic treatment. For a story that originally appeared twenty years ago, "The Obscure Move" is an astonishingly up-to-date study, conceived and executed with understanding and humor.

THE OBSCURE MOVE

by WADSWORTH CAMP

HIS FRIENDS have never understood why Morgan, one of the best of private detectives, gave up the excitements of the trail for the stupid dignity of office management. Morgan, naturally, didn't care to talk about it at first. Time is a good carpenter, however, and Morgan feels now that he may safely stand on the record. Here it is:

To begin with, Morgan was an odd one. If you had questioned him about the deductive method he would have laughed good-naturedly. It is equally certain that the mention of psychological analysis would have sent him to the dictionary for a clue. Common-sense and a sense of humour were his own stock in trade. His specialty was the smooth crook who keeps the money of the carelessly avaricious in circulation. Consequently he wore expensive clothing himself. He smoked large, fragrant cigars of Havana. When on the road — which was nine tenths of the time in those days — he frequented only the most luxurious hotels. Furthermore, he was fast acquiring an appearance of rotund prosperity quite out of key with the best-loved traditions of the stealthy profession. Still, as has been said, he was one of the most successful in that business.

Therefore, when the Duncan Investment Company closed its doors it was not surprising that the victims should have carried their resentment from the formal optimism of police headquarters to Morgan's agency.

Duncan, they explained, had fled with large sums which he had persuaded them to invest through a trifling lure of from fifty to a hundred per cent. They were law-abiding citizens none the less, and they felt it their duty to

society to see that Duncan, who had taken so much, should also receive what was judicially owing to him.

Morgan lighted a fresh perfecto.

"Rest easy," he told his clients. "I'll place Mr. Duncan in an iron cage where you can poke your fingers at him all you like."

After the sheep had flocked out, he gazed about his comfortable office, filled his pockets with cigars, locked his cellarette, and set forth on his adventures.

Morgan took the customary precautions in case the confidence man had his heart set on Canada or a trip abroad. But Duncan was too wary to thrust his head in the lion's jaw through any such first-offense methods. Instead he revealed the attributes of an eel, squirming, dodging, and once or twice nearly slipping across the Mexican border. The stout, good-natured detective, however, seemed to possess a special intuition. Time and again he made Duncan turn on his tracks. Then a very natural thing happened. When the chase got too hot, Duncan, who had been born and raised in Florida, sought ground which would be far more familiar to him than to his pursuer. Yet Morgan, entering Florida, was reminiscent of nothing so much as a fat, grinning cat, approaching the holeless corner into which he has driven his mouse.

When the police channels had run dry, the detective called on that peculiar intuition of his and bothered the lumber, turpentine, and phosphate men until he had located the fugitive in a timber camp far in the wilderness. Morgan was justly proud. Few men, if they had studied Duncan's record, would have dreamed of looking for him in the vicinity of manual labour.

Morgan's work had chiefly lain in comfort-furnished cities, but, by rail, by boat, by springless wagon, he bravely followed the trail. One crisp morning he reached his destination — a group of tiny, unpainted cabins clustered about a sawmill and a commissary.

With a look of high achievement lighting his face, Morgan shook the camp superintendent's hand.

"Peary and Amundsen and Doctor Cook have nothing on me," he said. "Just remind me to jot down my latitude and longitude so people'll believe I've really been here."

The superintendent stared.

"And it's inhabited!" Morgan went on with awe in his voice. "I'll write a

book, and maybe get decorated by the Swiss — or the Swedes, is it? Well, I made my dash on your word."

"How come you to suspect he was here?" the superintendent asked.

Morgan's voice fell.

"Perhaps a fortune teller saw it in the cards."

He laughed.

"What you laughing at?" the superintendent asked suspiciously.

"The idea of Beau Duncan's living here! Which may be his stylish bungalow?"

"His quarters, you mean? The shanty yonder with the busted window light."

"And some of the best hotels have stopped paying dividends since he left town. The lobster palaces are all in heliotrope for him. Where's old Beau Brummel Duncan now? At the golf club or leading a black-face cotillion?"

"Naw," the superintendent said. "I allow he's doing an honest day's work on the skidder. That's about three miles from here."

"The president of your company told me you were a deputy sheriff."

The superintendent proudly displayed his badge.

"Maybe it puts us in the same criminal class with Duncan," Morgan said, "but we're paid to work. Let's make a bluff, anyway."

The superintendent led two raw-boned little horses from the corral. He considered Morgan's portly person with a thoughtful eye, then brought a soap box from the commissariat. Morgan mounted to the soap box and thence to the saddle. He settled himself gingerly.

"Don't you worry if you ever run out of razors," he advised. "You might take a chance on Dobbin's backbone. I've tried every means of locomotion on this case except aviating, and if Dobbin gallops it will be that or coming in two. I think animals are fond of you. Use your influence. Don't let this one overdo himself on my account."

Proceeding cautiously, they followed the lumber tramway until they came to an open space where a donkey engine was noisily loading logs on a string of flat cars. At first Morgan thought the workers about the engine were all negroes, but finally he realized that, except for dirt and grime, one of them was white.

"According to the description that ought to be my affinity," he said.

They dismounted and left the horses loose, as they had shown no exceptional aggressiveness, to crop the wiry grass. Morgan followed the superin-

tendent in a wide and casual circle toward the donkey engine. The superintendent, as though he were showing off the activities of the clearing to an interested stranger, frequently stopped to point with broad gestures in one direction or another.

"Better cut that stuff," Morgan warned. "Remember, Duncan isn't any stage crook. He has real brains."

Duncan, in fact, had already turned from his work. He leaned on his log hook, staring at the detective. Then he carefully placed the hook on a flat car, thrust his hands in his pockets, and loafed in the direction of the horses. Morgan and the superintendent quickened their pace. Evidently that was sufficient proof for Duncan, for, with a yell, he threw pretence aside, vaulted a log, and broke into a run.

Morgan started heavily after him, but Duncan was younger, slenderer, and much better conditioned. By the time Morgan had reached his horse and had clambered to the saddle in apparent defiance of the laws of gravity, Duncan was already well away on a sandy track which entered the woods at a right angle to the tramway.

When duty beckoned no chances were too great for Morgan. He set his teeth as he urged his horse to a gallop. Swaying from side to side or bobbing up and down with surprised little grunts, he clutched impulsively at the animal's mane and went in pursuit.

The track wound into the virgin forest. Almost immediately the landscape seemed to conspire lawlessly for the protection of the fugitive. The trees thickened. A dense underbrush sprang up. A growth of saplings cluttered the soil between the trunks. Morgan's horse was a self-centred brute. In worming his quick way among the saplings, he allowed only for his emaciated body. Consequently, the detective had to look out for his own too-solid person. What with lifting one fat leg or the other to escape bruises and fractures against the eager saplings, and what with ducking beneath overhanging branches to avoid being brushed from the saddle, he must have presented the appearance of a grotesque jumping-jack answering to eccentric strings.

Duncan clearly received this impression, for the last Morgan saw of him the other was going through a black, shallow stream, his hand upraised in a mocking and undignified farewell. And the last Morgan heard of him was laughter — unrestrained, joyous, insulting.

But Morgan plodded ahead, hoping that the hummock would soon give

way to open forest land where he might wear the fugitive down. The underbrush, however, closed more riotously about him. There were many stagnant pools which obscured and finally obliterated Duncan's trail. Morgan brought his horse to a halt. He half fell from his saddle. He looked about him, for once at a loss.

Yellow slash pine, towering with forbidding indifference in all directions, spread their green-plumed tops in a roof so thick that the sun could force its way through only at long intervals. Scrub palmettos, like huge caterpillars, squirmed along the ground and thrust green tentacles upward from their ends. Here and there one reared its body higher than horse and man. Stunted maple and gum fought for life in the perpetual twilight, and in the wettest places thick-boled cypresses raised their ghastly frames, strung with moss that had the appearance of matted hair. The ground was soggy underfoot, and the air was hot, damp, and full of decay.

Morgan whistled.

"This," he mused, "is somewhat more of a place than that panorama of hades I paid ten cents to see in Coney Island last summer. Besides, it's several stations farther from Times Square."

He took off his hat, drew an immaculate linen handkerchief from his pocket, and mopped his heated brow. There was no virtue in stubbornness now. Duncan had undoubtedly given him the slip for the present. His best scheme was to return to the lumber camp, where he could arrange to watch the outlets of the forest.

He mounted with considerable difficulty and some strategy, then turned his horse's head. But the many stagnant pools had confused his own trail as thoroughly as they had Duncan's. When the sun set he made a wry face and acknowledged he was lost.

The prospect of spending the night in the swamp was very annoying to one of Morgan's habits. Since his lungs were perfectly sound he had never interested himself in all this talk about outdoor sleeping, but he was ready to back at odds the fact that it couldn't be done either comfortably or beneficially here. The ground was too wet for one thing, and, for another, it was probably friendly to snakes. He had a wholesome respect for snakes. Yet he was certain his raw-boned horse couldn't support him all night. He had already examined him several times to see if his back was sagging.

He tumbled to the ground again, tied the horse to a sapling, and walked to a fallen log. After he had thoroughly searched the neighbourhood for rep-

tiles, he sat down and munched some of the sweet chocolate he always carried for emergencies. Then he lighted a red-banded Havana. His heart sank at the recollection that his pocket carried only two more of those luxuries. Ah, well, they would last until the next morning, when he would certainly be back at the camp.

While he smoked, the drowsy wood life of the warm day melted into a new note as the melancholy creatures of night awoke. Morgan shivered. He had never cared for the country. The only birds whose music he understood fluttered along Broadway or in and out of the Tombs.

He sprang upright at a rustling in the grass behind the log. Snakes, he was sure! He lamented his lack of experience with country jobs, but he remembered reading somewhere that hunters build fires as a protection against such rural denizens as lions and tigers. It might work with snakes. He gathered a pile of sticks and started a meagre blaze. Afterward he lay down, but rest was not easy in the swamp. An owl declaimed its dismal periods nearby; a whippoorwill called disconsolately; a high-pitched, vibrant outcry brought him erect, every nerve alert, his hand on his revolver; some heavy body crashed past; always he imagined furtive rustlings in the grass about him. A case had once taken him to the opera. He had slept through "Gotterdammerung," but that was a soporific compared with this.

It began to rain. He saw his fire diminish and die. He fancied the rustlings were closer, and he had no idea what hunters did when their fires went out. He lifted his feet. He hugged his knees. In this unprofessional attitude he spent the remainder of the night without sleep.

When the gray dawn came he looked in vain for his horse. The broken bridle dangled eloquently from the sapling.

Chilled to the bone and wet, Morgan set out, determined to make Duncan pay in some way for this night just past. He imagined the confidence man, at the end of a multiplicity of adventures, completely at his mercy — even on his knees, begging for mercy. What he wouldn't say to Duncan then! Or, if Duncan resisted, what he wouldn't do to Duncan! These pleasant thoughts served to pass the time, but they brought him no nearer the edge of the swamp. When night fell his weariness overcame his fear of snakes and he slept.

By rare good luck he shot a wild turkey the next morning and managed to broil it over a smouldering fire. Near the fire he stayed all day, for it still rained and he felt rheumatic.

Another night came, and another day of rain. He lost track of time. The feeling that he had spent most of his life in the swamp depressed him. As a matter of fact, it was the fifth day when the storm finally ceased.

Morgan, sitting in the warm, bland sunlight, took stock of himself. The prosperous, well-dressed detective who had entered the swamp had become a mass of discomforts to which rags clung. He was undecided as to whether the rheumatism or his lack of tobacco hurt the more. He had only two cartridges left, and from past experience he knew they might not bring him a single morsel. It behooved him to get on his feet and escape from this hole, rheumatism or no rheumatism.

With the sun shining he could be reasonably sure he was keeping to a straight line. But the swamp was evidently interminable. His lack of success pricked his anger against Duncan. He swore aloud.

"Let me get my hands on that slick article who let me in for this! Just let me see him! Just let me get within striking distance!"

It was about this time that he turned pale and leaned weakly against a tree. He had heard a man shout.

As he opened his lips he wondered if the rain, the cold, the long disuse had affected his voice. Would it respond to his will at this vital moment? It was more than a shout. It was a roar that left his throat. And from somewhere a voice answered, triumphantly, hysterically.

Almost immediately Morgan saw a man running toward him, splashing through pools, waving his arms, crying out incoherently. Morgan straightened and began running, too, in the direction of this figure so like a scarecrow. It was a human being. It meant companionship, conversation, a touch of the world again. Heaven knew he needed all that!

Then Morgan saw that it was Duncan. At the same moment Duncan saw that it was Morgan.

Duncan sprang behind a tree. He thrust his arms out in frantic gestures. Morgan drew his revolver. He walked steadily forward.

"Duncan, my dear, it's struck twelve. Come on out now and take your medicine."

"Gently! Gently!" Duncan called. "I give you fair warning!"

Morgan walked faster.

"Fire away. I'll take my chances."

"Don't misunderstand me," Duncan said. "I haven't a gun. Do you think I would harm a hair of your head if I had? I have a better weapon than that.

Come any closer and I'll run like the devil."

Morgan stopped. Vengeance was in his heart, but he permitted himself a glimpse at the reverse of the picture.

"Duncan! For God's sake, don't do that!"

"Then you'll listen to reason."

Morgan smiled again.

"It's a bluff, Duncan. Maybe you can run like Bryan, but you haven't the nerve."

"Be reasonable or you'll see," Duncan threatened. "I'm a human being. So are you, I take it."

Morgan's smile broadened.

"Don't be foolish with other people's money and bet on it."

Duncan pulled at the torn fringe of his short sleeves. He shifted his feet.

"Suppose I surrendered?" he asked. "Where would you find a policeman or a patrol wagon? Could you get me out of here?"

"I can't seem to find a taxi for myself," Morgan replied. "But I'll land you in the cooler yet."

"If we live," Duncan said, "and nothing happens, and all goes well, and *deus volens*."

"Don't swear in a foreign tongue," Morgan answered.

"Let's confer on the main problem," Duncan proposed. "If you don't agree I'll run and leave you alone. I don't believe you're very good company for yourself just now."

"As far as that's concerned," Morgan grinned, "if I were you I'd hate myself by this time."

"So I do, and I want a truce," Duncan blurted out.

Morgan sighed.

"All right," he agreed. "I'll mark this place, and when we're through you can go play Indian again."

Duncan stepped out. His hair was heavy and tangled. The thick black growth on his face made his eyes seem very large, white, and hungry.

"If I had had you along," Morgan said, "I needn't have been afraid of the snakes."

Duncan came straight to him and put his hand on his shoulder.

"You don't know how good it is to see you, Morgan. I've been denied even the companionship of my horse. He got bogged."

Morgan's voice was a little husky as he asked:

"Say, you don't happen to have a cigar hidden away on your clothes?"

"No, but I retain the essentials."

He produced a large sack of cheap flake tobacco and a package of cigarette papers.

"I never smoked those puff rolls," Morgan said disappointedly. "I couldn't roll one of them if it would get me out of this swamp."

"Permit me to roll it for you," Duncan offered.

And he did it, deftly and lovingly, and passed it to the detective. Then he rolled one for himself, and they sat on a log, shoulders touching, while they smoked contentedly.

"So you're Bob Morgan!" Duncan said. "The famous Morgan! I must confess your present state isn't up to your reputation. You might at least have brought a few necessities in with you."

Morgan glanced at the soiled, tattered figure.

"Beau," he said, "believe me, you're not up to it. If you come any more of that easy money talk on me I'll scream for help."

They both spoke in soft, silky, wondering voices, as though admiring the unaccustomed sounds; and at Morgan's words they burst into high-pitched laughter that was so terrifying in their ears it ceased immediately.

"Glad to meet you, Duncan," Morgan said gruffly. "But I don't want to tap any wires or buy any green goods. Let that be understood."

Duncan shook his head.

"Morgan," he announced, "there is something radically wrong with us."

"Better patent that discovery."

Duncan shook his head again.

"No," he continued. "We're not living up to tradition."

"I'm scarcely living at all," Morgan said.

"For a detective and a fugitive," Duncan declared, "we show extraordinary good sense. Romantically speaking, we should be at each other's throats."

"Cut it, and prepare me another whiff of joy."

But Duncan good-humouredly refused to manufacture any more cigarettes until Morgan had consented to some working arrangement.

The decision to join forces until they had found a way out of the swamp, if the thing could be done, was a matter of a moment. That the chase should recommence once they were out was also agreed to at once. They divided only on the start the detective should give the criminal. Morgan offered

half an hour, and Duncan demanded half a day. Morgan wanted to smoke. Duncan was hungry. Morgan produced from his pocket a few small bones to which tiny shreds of meat still clung, and these he kept prominently in view while the other carelessly dangled the paper and the tobacco bag in his fingers. They began to compromise.

By the time they had settled on an hour and a half the sun was down. They made camp. Duncan proved himself more adept than Morgan at building fires. When he had a pile of brushwood blazing he went in search of certain edible roots on which he had largely subsisted for the last few days. He brought some of these back and shared them with the detective.

The gobbling of wild turkeys awoke them at dawn, and they crept to a clump of palmettos at the foot of a dead cypress. As the sky lightened behind the gibbet-like branches, a row of birds appeared in silhouette. Morgan rested his arm against a palmetto trunk, aimed, and brought one of the birds down.

Duncan patted him on the back.

"You would have made a fortune conducting a shooting gallery, Morgan."

"Yeh. And if I live to tell about that shot up north, I'll feel like a liar and everybody'll know I'm one."

The turkey solved the food problem for the present, and, as long as the sun shone, they knew their chances for speedy escape were good. But the clouds turned black again in the afternoon, and a dismal downpour commenced.

"Doesn't it do anything but rain in this hole?" Morgan grieved.

"We are below the snow line," Duncan explained. "I suggest camping here before we start walking in circles."

They made a fire and by the last daylight gathered a heap of wood.

Duncan regretted their lack of a pack of cards to pass the time. This gave Morgan a thought.

"You don't happen by any crazy chance to play chess, Duncan?"

"I know something more than the moves."

"Three cheers," Morgan cried.

He felt in his pocket and brought forth a small pocket chess board.

"When I'm traveling alone I often irritate myself working problems on this. I was using it on the train only a thousand years or so ago."

They moved closer to the fire, tossed for sides, arranged the markers, and in a few minutes their minds were far away from the swamp and their plight.

They were well matched. Morgan, who had the white pieces, opened with a brilliant, puzzling attack on the king's side; but Duncan, with confidence and forethought, combined his forces in a flawless defense. As they recognized each other's ability they took more time for their moves. Morgan would lean forward, pursing his lips, studious lines showing on his forehead, while Duncan, eyes intent on the board, would roll a couple of cigarettes, pass one to his opponent, reach out his hand to the fire, and offer a burning brand for a light. It was very exciting. Perhaps they saw in the game a symbol of their relations — detective against criminal, and both most excellent players. It was very late when Morgan unmasked his rooks and trapped Duncan's knight on the king's line.

Duncan leaned back.

"You play a strong game, Morgan."

The detective was pleased by his victory.

"You're pretty good practice for me, Beau," he conceded. "But you ought to have left that pawn of mine alone. It was a gold brick. Oh! Excuse me for talking shop. Hello! It's still raining."

The storm ceased the next day for only a few minutes. They did not travel far, because Morgan complained of what he called his growing pains.

That night they played chess again. Duncan won.

"A game apiece," Morgan said. "To-morrow night'll be the rubber. Waterloo won't be jack stones to what I'll do to you."

But Morgan was in no condition to walk the next day. He lay by the smouldering fire, inclined to complain.

"Another twenty-four hours and you'll be all right," Duncan said cheerily.

"I'll never be all right again," Morgan lamented.

Duncan dried enough sticks and moss at the fire to make a crude bed. He lifted Morgan from the wet ground, then prepared a soup of turkey bones and roots in the detective's drinking cup. Morgan drank it with relish, but his ailments occupied his mind to the exclusion of chess. So Duncan sat at his side, watching the fire and trying to keep up his spirits.

The last clouds sailed away in the morning. The cold, wet weather was routed. But Morgan's vocabulary was not sufficiently large to let him walk far at a time. After several attempts he gave up and lay down, groaning.

"Poor old Morgan," Duncan said, leaning sympathetically over him.

"Go to the corner and send in an ambulance call," Morgan answered

with a grimace. "Then bid me farewell before it begins to pour again. If you hang around for me we'll both die of water on the brain."

Duncan patted his shoulder.

"For Heaven's sake, don't get delirious — Bob."

For some time Morgan frowned at the fire.

"Beau," he said at last, "I mean it. I haven't got the build for a millstone. Besides, I can't be under obligations. I can't let pleasure interfere with business. If you get out do me just two favours. Send a posse in for me and wire the office to get another man after you as quick as lightning."

"My position is very simple," Duncan answered. "I wouldn't leave you if you offered me title to all the real estate in this swamp."

Morgan grinned.

"Since you're talking shop, Beau, you may be a Southern cavalier and me a Yankee born, but I never took fifty per cent, and I see ten suckers in my business any day where you see one."

"No use trying to get me mad, Bobbie. I'm too selfish to leave you and face this cheerless world alone."

"Well, just remember, Beau, I'll get you. As sure as the whole world's gone to grass and water, I'll get you."

"I admire ambition," Duncan said. "I regret that I can not encourage it. But the problem need not trouble us at present. Let me make you comfortable, then I'll roll you another cigarette."

He carried Morgan to a sunny spot, and gave his limbs a thorough, hard massage. Afterward the detective struggled up and began to walk in a crouching position. Duncan cut a stout stick for him. He took his arm and helped him all he could.

"You're sure full of sand, Bob," he said.

Without answering, Morgan walked on. Now and then he would pause, but always, after a few minutes' rest, he would start forward again. By and by his figure crouched less and his steps grew longer.

He was exhausted when they made camp, but the worst of his pains had left him, and it was he who proposed after supper that they play the rubber game.

"I'm an awful object to think about," he explained. "Men have gone nutty over less. I've got to get my mind off myself. Besides, I'd like to know who's the better man. If I hadn't lost sight of one thing last time there wouldn't have been anything to it."

The game was slow. Each was determined to win, so each took as long as he pleased for his moves. Morgan, when he could scarcely keep his eyes open, suggested that they postpone the finish until the next evening.

"I guess I'm trained a little fine," he said. "I don't want to make a slip."

"It looks like a draw to me," Duncan answered.

"It looked as though I'd get out of this swamp the day I came in, but did I? Study the board. I can see more than one way to slip over a knock-out."

Duncan laughed.

"I'm afraid you'll never win this game."

"I've got to and I will," Morgan said. "I'll bet you three pine trees and a case of swamp water — magnums!"

He folded the board, returned it to his pocket, lay down, and was fast asleep in a twinkling.

They were off by the time the sun had slipped its first long shadows through the swamp. Morgan was convalescent. He walked steadily onward, resting one hand on Duncan's shoulder. They talked of the unfinished game which had assumed colossal proportions in their dwarfed minds. But that rubber was destined never to be finished. It was a little after noon when Morgan said in a hushed voice:

"Beau, wait a minute."

"What's the matter?" Duncan whispered as he stopped.

"This darned swamp's thinning."

"It had occurred to me," Duncan agreed. "I was afraid to speak of it."

"Look at those palmetto clumps," Morgan went on excitedly. "They're not as high or as thick. There isn't as much water. Beau, old boy, I believe we're going to get out!"

"There's certainly higher ground ahead," Duncan answered. "Come on, Bobbie."

"Beau! Think of the food and the cigars!"

"Oh, you won't have any taste for decent tobacco," Duncan said carelessly.

Morgan made a wry face and rubbed his knee.

"And this rich food isn't all it's cracked up to be. Rich food for the idle rich!"

They struggled through the last of the underbrush and stepped into the open pine forest. There was hard soil or sand beneath their feet. About them the sun laid warm, caressing fingers of light. Insects droned, and birds sang joyously. Before long they came to trees scarred by turpentiners, and later

to a wood road.

They paused and stood awkwardly for a few minutes without words. The road — narrow, twisting, and overgrown — screamed of civilization, of populous cities, and of marts noisy with commerce.

"We've discovered America," Morgan said.

"Yes," replied Duncan. In a moment he added: "I believe you agreed to give me an hour and a half. Therefore, I will resume my travels."

Morgan looked at him with an air of childish wonder.

"So I did," he answered dreamily — "an hour and a half!"

He pulled his wits together.

"Cross my heart, I'll stay where I am for an hour and a half after I lose sight of you."

"Quite satisfactory," Duncan said.

"Before you go," Morgan began uncomfortably, "I'd like to hand you a few words of thanks on this auspicious occasion."

"There's no question of thanks," Duncan protested politely. "Undoubtedly we were mutually helpful."

Morgan extended his hand.

"Beau, good-bye."

He essayed a little humour.

"That is — so long. It won't be many days before we meet again. I am looking forward to it."

Duncan took the detective's hand.

"This is an eternal farewell. In some ways I regret it. Good-bye, Bob. You're sure you can navigate until you come to a house?"

"Sure. I'll steer into the first drydock I see and have them light a fire under me."

Their hands dropped. Duncan hesitated. Finally he put his fingers in his pocket, pulled out tobacco and paper, and rolled a cigarette. He handed it to Morgan, who mechanically placed it between his lips. Duncan divided the tobacco. He gave a part of it with several papers to Morgan. Then he turned and strode off through the woods.

Morgan sat down. He watched the tall, gaunt figure about which ragged clothing flapped until it was out of sight. Very soon he became restless. He took the paper and tobacco and tried to make a cigarette, but his fingers were clumsy. The flakes spilled, and the thin, slippery paper tore. As his desire to smoke even this distasteful makeshift increased, the picture of Dun-

can's deft manipulation came into his fancy and lingered.

He opened the chess board to study the unfinished game. His line of attack was perfectly clear in his mind now. As move by move its beauties unfolded he chuckled quietly. Duncan was helpless. Suddenly his chuckling ceased. There was one obscure move that Duncan might have offered in reply. It would have spoiled the entire combination. Yet it was the advancing of a pawn on the extreme flank, and its immediate significance appeared of minor importance.

"Duncan wasn't wise to it," he told himself.

And after a moment:

"Could Duncan have been hep?"

He puzzled over the board for a long time. He arose and paced back and forth.

"He might have forced a draw with that move," he mused, "or even a winning attack. I've got to know what he would have done. I'll ask him when I nab him."

He took out his watch. Duncan had been gone two hours.

Morgan didn't follow the route Duncan had taken. The memory of his lonely wanderings kept him in the road which brought him before dark to a turpentine camp. He accepted the foreman's hospitality for the night.

He set out early the next morning with the foreman's horse and buggy which he was to send back from the nearest railroad station, five hours away. The road was long and monotonous, but he sat at his ease, smoking bad cigars which he had bought at the camp, and singing snatches of popular songs in praise of his release from muscular effort.

His thoughts of Duncan centred about the uncompleted game of chess. While he was confident that Duncan's capture was only a matter of time, he refused to bother his head with definite plans until he reached the railroad. These few hours, this long journey, were a vacation from mental and physical labour — an excursion in contentment.

The appearance of the country had not altered when the shriek of a locomotive whistle warned him his ride was nearly ended. He touched the whip to his horse for the first time and was soon on the right of way. He saw the glittering lines of steel, a rough section house, and a water tank; but in front of him the woods were as thick as those he had just left. He pulled up, thoroughly puzzled, for he had expected to find a station at this crossing.

Suddenly his curiosity died. His indolent figure stiffened. His hand went

to his coat pocket where the revolver with its single remaining cartridge lay. A filthy man in rags was trying to conceal himself behind one of the insufficient tank supports.

Morgan stepped from the buggy, levelling his revolver.

"Duncan," he said, "I warned you it was 'so long.' "

"It's Morgan, of all the world," Duncan answered, but his smile was sickly. "If that train had only stopped I'd have missed this pleasant reunion."

"You ought to be grateful. Nice people are waiting to weep on your neck up North. Come on out and let's hurry home."

"Not so fast, Morgan. I can easily get away from you. But I confess to a strong desire to finish that game. Suppose for that purpose we arrange another truce."

"We'll finish it on the train," Morgan answered with a grin. "I've got you beaten so many ways I blush to think of it."

"Have you?" Duncan asked slily. "How about that pawn? I win!"

Morgan's mouth opened. His revolver arm dropped.

"You never saw that ——"

Duncan sprang from behind his post, and bounded across the right of way for the woods.

Morgan raised his arm again.

"Stop or I'll shoot!"

But Duncan ran the faster. The muzzle of Morgan's revolver was pointed at the fugitive's back. He had brought down wild turkeys. The result was certain.

Then his arm swayed gently to one side. The movement seemed almost involuntary. He pulled the trigger. He sped his last cartridge into the heart of an innocent pine tree.

He thrust the gun in his pocket and started in pursuit. When he reached the edge of the woods Duncan had disappeared. Morgan sank to the ground. He rubbed his knees ruefully. He shook his head. He shrugged his shoulders. Sitting there in a heap he lighted one of his vile cigars.

"That blasted rheumatism!" he moaned. "That blasted rheumatism! It must have jumped to my gun arm. I'll have to report sick. I'm not worth a hill of beans at this business as I am. I wonder if I've got anything besides rheumatism."

As he blew the stinging smoke from his nostrils he smiled reminiscently.

A special treat for you this month. The author of "Beau Geste" offers us one of the most deceptive little mysteries in modern fiction. It is a mystery, not of crime, but of situation — a strange problem that confronted the Mayor of Sonango, in Central America, on that awful day known thenceforth as "Boulder Day"; and how the laziest hidalgo *between the Rio Grande del Norte and the Panama Canal solved it. Can you? Percival Christopher Wren calls it "Simple." Perhaps you won't find it so!*

SIMPLE

by P. C. WREN

CENTRAL AMERICA covers a big area and contains a large and very mixed population varying from hundred-per-cent Americans and pure-bred Europeans by way of fifty-per-cent half-bred *mestizos* to equally pure-bred Indians and Negroes.

Among the people of Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Salvador and Nicaragua are hard-working men and lazy men, and among the latter are to be found the very laziest in all the world.

It is a rash statement, but a reasonable and a tenable one withal, that Señor José Hernandez held the palm, as The Laziest of the Lazy, between the Rio Grande del Norte and the Panama Canal.

Naturally he was almost as poor as he was lazy, but not quite, because, being a *hidalgo* of bluest blood and unmixed descent, he had but to ask and it was given unto him — to the extent of at least ten centavos a time. But even asking involves effort, and, every evening, Señor José was constrained to rise from his comfortable seat in the shady Plaza, stroll along the Avenida Reale and accost such Europeans as he might meet. Only white men, of course; for José Hernandez had his pride, and no caballero begs from an Indian or a half-caste, however much better off such people may be than himself. A *caballero* may have no shirt, no socks, only a shoe and a half, and a cotton coat and trousers long unassailed by a Chinese laundryman, and still remain a *caballero*, a *hidalgo* and a gentleman, a *Don.*

And to such, any right-thinking and well-behaved European will give a ten-, twenty-, or fifty-centavo piece, or even a peso. For his heart will be touched at the sight of quiet and dignified suffering, provided he has not been "touched" too often.

So, to the extent of walking a few yards and saying a few words, Señor José Hernandez had to work. It was annoying, but when he had collected a few tens, twenties and fifties, he could go to a stall and there take his choice of hot *tamales*, fried bananas, *cuchilladas*, *frijoles*, enticing sweetmeats, admirable rolls and excellent coffee. Thereafter a few cigarettes, pleasantly enriched with just a little *marijuana*, and a glass of *tequila*. And so to bed — on the same bench, his armchair by day, his couch by night.

Ours is a strange world, replete with remarkable phenomena. One of these is the fact that José's brother, Don Pedro Hernandez, if not one of the busiest men in all Central America, was undoubtedly, and by far, the most industrious, hard-working, capable and successful man in San Antonio if not the whole State of Sonango.

And, as naturally as completest idleness and unadulterated laziness kept José poor as a man may be and live, so, inevitably, had constant hard work, hard scheming and ruthless seizing of every opportunity enriched the admirable Pedro.

While one brother sat in his two-piece suit and his piece-and-half shoes, the other dwelt in a fine house, rode in a fine car, and enjoyed that universal admiration and respect, regard and honour which are the right and proper due of every wealthy man.

One thing Señor Pedro Hernandez did not enjoy was the sight of his disgraceful and abominable brother seated ragged, unwashed and unshorn, from morning till night on his bench in the Plaza, or making his evening predatory stroll along the Avenida Reale in search of the easy centavo.

José was to Pedro a thorn in the side; a curse and a cross which he bore with ill grace. José was the elephant in Pedro's ointment.

Not only was it galling to Pedro's pride that his own brother lived upon the casual and careless charity of Pedro's fellow-citizens, but it was particularly irksome to know that his enemies — and even the rich have enemies — took a mean and despicable pleasure in tossing coppers to his brother as they passed the spot where he sat at the receipt of custom, or when they met him on his evening excursion between the Plaza and the Hotel Grande Imperiale. For there were not a few malicious scoundrels in San Antonio who, laughing aloud, would enter their favourite bar and observe to their friends, its *habitués:*

"Just met Pedro Hernandez's begging brother and tipped him a fifty. A bone-idle loafer! But damned if I don't like him the better of the two."

And another, with a nasty snigger, would observe:

"Inasmuch as Don José Hernandez does nothing whatsoever, he does nothing wrong. Which is more than one can say for the noble Don Pedro."

Kind friends — as kind friends will — always told Pedro all about that sort of talk.

But whether José was more likeable than Pedro or not, it is unfortunately undeniable that José was by far the happier of the two.

That such should be the case is of course very wrong, undesirable, and unmoral.

But such, nevertheless, was the position of affairs when there dawned that epochal day known thenceforth, in San Antonio and the parts adjacent, as Boulder Day.

During the darkness of the early hours of that memorable morning, the Earth, as it so frequently did in the state of Sonango, seemed to stretch in its sleep, to turn over, to yawn (in several places) and to give a comfortable little wriggle ere settling down to dream again.

On this occasion, the comfortable little wriggle dislodged a boulder perched somewhat precariously on the side of the mountain that somewhat dubiously protects San Antonio. It was quite a considerable boulder, being about the size of a well-nourished hippopotamus; rotound, indeed, almost spherical.

Released from its resting-place, and doubtless (unlike José) weary of the spot where it had slumbered for so long, it rolled away merrily, and positively bounding with glee, and gaining momentum at every leap, careened down the mountainside, skipped joyously over a shallow *arroyo*, playfully burst through the houses on both sides of a street, and, by them slightly diverted from its course, bowled innocuously as a child's hoop, straight down the centre of the Avenida. At length, with a sigh of satisfaction, it came to rest, none too soon for the safety and welfare of life and property in the town of San Antonio.

But it was definitely unfortunate that the Boulder, which stood higher than a big boy and would have needed the outstretched arms of three men for its encirclement, should have come to rest in the exact spot where, somewhat casually perhaps, the tramlines cross the light railway that runs through San Antonio from Jimenez to Loyopa, and right in the way of the not inconsiderable motor, wagon, *burro* and other traffic that throngs the busy Avenida.

Imagine if you can the consternation of the City Fathers, the anxiety of the worried Mayor, as angrily the wires hummed from up and down the railway, on the subject of the complete blockage of line; as angrily the manager of the San Antonio Light, Power, and Tramway Company assailed him about the blockage of the track; and as leading citizens protested by telephone, telegram and letter, against the inconvenience and annoyance to which they, as merchants and tradesmen, were subjected by the traffic and hold-up.

But, as the Mayor pointed out to the Municipality in Council, it was very easy for railway traffic-superintendents to send telegrams, for tramway managers to make telephone calls, for lorry and taxicab proprietors to make personal calls and personal remarks; but among the few things they forgot to tell him, was how to remove the colossal Boulder!

"Couldn't it be dragged away?" enquired a Municipal Councillor, desirous of offering helpful municipal counsel.

"Oh, undoubtedly, undoubtedly," said the Mayor, "if only we had ten thousand traction engines and the means of harnessing them to it."

"Couldn't one of our leading contractors, such as Señor Pedro Hernandez, construct a sort of platform on wheels and attach . . . ?"

"Oh, doubtless, doubtless," smiled the Mayor. "Given a few months, I am perfectly certain he could build 'a sort of platform on wheels' of sufficient strength to bear the immeasurable weight of that gigantic rock. . . . And he having done so, perhaps you yourself would be good enough to push the stone on to it, my dear friend?"

Undeterred by the Mayor's sarcasm, another Councillor made a suggestion.

"What about a crane?" he said. "Are not such contrivances made for the lifting of great weights?"

"True, true," agreed the Mayor. "Brilliant. I shouldn't be in the least surprised to learn that in Pittsburgh, U.S.A., or Birmingham, England, there exists a crane that could lift a stone as big as a house and weighing hundreds of tons. But this is San Antonio, Sonango; and I do not at the moment recollect seeing a crane a hundred feet high and a million horse-power strong in anybody's back-yard."

In silence the Council sat biting its nails, gnawing its knuckles, nibbling its beard, or merely scratching its head.

Then, as was his place and duty, the Vice-President of the Municipal

Council did his bit, and was delivered of a helpful suggestion.

"Dynamite!" he said explosively.

The Mayor suppressed a groan, refrained from rudeness, and observed:

"The Señor would suggest blowing the Boulder, San Antonio, and half the State of Sonango to . . . to . . ."

"To hell," murmured a Councillor readily.

"To dust, I was about to say," continued the Mayor. "But doubtless our friend knows his own destination best."

But dynamite, like many other dangerous subjects, has a certain attraction.

"Couldn't we have holes drilled in the Boulder and then let sticks of dynamite be inserted in the holes; and then, not exactly blow it to pieces, but — er — break it up, disintegrate it," suggested a grave and reverend Señor.

"Oh, we could. Undoubtedly we could," replied the Mayor. "Suppose you go and tell the proprietor of the Hotel Imperiale, outside which the Boulder rests, that you propose to do it.

"And ask him if he has any objection to having his windows blown in, his ceilings brought down, and such of his guests as are not killed, driven insane, or deafened for life," he added.

Other solutions were propounded, each more fantastic than the last, until, through sheer weariness and a laudable desire to prevent a free fight, if not murder, the distracted Mayor dissolved the Council, with nothing accomplished, nothing done to earn a night's repose — or achieve the removal of the Boulder.

One thing he could, and would, and did do; and that was to offer a reward of one thousand pesos to anyone who could make a practicable suggestion for the removal of the colossal stone; and ten thousand pesos to him who should achieve it without further damage to life and property in the city of San Antonio. . . .

Returning that night from his office in the City Hall to his once happy home, weary and worn and sad, dejected and depressed to the lowest depths, he passed the seat in the Plaza on which rested Don José Hernandez.

"Señor!" languidly murmured that gentleman. "You want the Boulder removed. I will remove it for you this very night — at the stated price."

The Mayor was not amused and briefly intimated the fact.

"Nevertheless, Señor," smiled José gently, "if the sun should rise to-

morrow upon the spot where the Boulder now rests and find it empty; find the Boulder vanished with the other miasmas and mists of the morning, I shall apply to you for the sum of eleven thousand pesos."

"Yes. And you'll get them!" grunted the Mayor. "And eleven thousand more," he added contemptuously. "Doubtless you propose to eat it."

"The money? Most of it. I shall drink some of it, of course."

"I meant the Boulder," replied the Mayor, added a little blasphemy, and went on his way, not rejoicing.

And in the morning the sun rose as usual upon the town of San Antonio and beheld it as usual, inasmuch as no gigantic boulder lay paralysing the transport activities of the city.

Informed of the fact ere yet he had left his bed the Mayor could not believe his ears; and five minutes later could not believe the evidence of his eyes.

Slowly, and in a sense reluctantly, he did believe that of the tired-born, languid-bred and lazy-living Señor José Hernandez who, looking if possible more weary than ever, approached him and murmured:

"Would you rather pay the twenty-two thousand pesos into the Bank of Mexico in a lump sum, or hand me two pesos daily for the next thirty years?"

The Mayor appeared to swallow something large, and drew a deep breath.

"Name of the Eternal Father!" he stammered. "But . . . But . . . How did . . . you . . . do . . . it?"

Well, how did Don José do it? For this brilliant little story of Percival Wren's is not only a literary pleasure, it is a mystery puzzle, too, with the added fascination of all such pleasant pastimes. . . . Can you figure out Don José's solution to the Problem of the Obstructive Boulder? If you cannot, read what Mr. Wren has to say — in the last two paragraphs of the story, printed upside down directly below!

of begging.

Since Boulder Day, Don José Hernandez has been spared even the labour

peons, to dig a big hole beside it. It rolled in, and they covered it up."

"Oh, I induced a number of my friends, simple-minded and hard-working

The League of Forgotten Men

NUMBER 4

Messrs. Mitchel and Barnes

Our favorite department brings you this month No. 4 in our League of Forgotten Detectives. This time it is a brace of detectives — Mr. Robert Leroy Mitchel, scholar and artist, who "turned his trained powers of analysis to the study of crime," and Mr. Barnes, known as "the cleverest professional detective" of his time. The time is 1898, the author Rodrigues Ottolengui, one of the most neglected of the early mystery writers — although occasionally someone with a long gray beard will speak of Ottolengui's once-famous book, "An Artist in Crime." It is interesting to note that writing detective stories runs in the Ottolengui family; for his notable contemporary relative is none other than Octavus Roy Cohen, creator of Florian Slappey and Jim Hanvey. . . . We warn you: "A Frosty Morning" is old-fashioned. But it has a charm that many modern stories lack; and it makes warm, enjoyable reading.

A FROSTY MORNING

or, The Mystery of the One-Thousand-Pound Note

by RODRIGUES OTTOLENGUI

"THEN as I understand it, you know that there is a thousand-pound note in this room, and yet you can't find it. In other words, Mr. Van Rawlston, you wish to know whether a thing can be lost when you know where it is."

The speaker's companion, a man of fifty, with the bearing of one accustomed to large affairs, frowned impatiently. A trusted and powerful financier, one grown gray in the management of huge interests, he chafed at the smallness of the mystery which yet seemed to reflect on his executorship of the estate to which the thousand-pound note belonged. And it was with some stiffness that he began: —

"Of course I understand that to a man of your experience this matter seems insignificant; but I am up to my ears in mystery. Mr. Barnes, the

cleverest professional detective in New York, has spent hours in searching this room — without success. In despair I thought of you, with your cool, analytical brain, and I sent for you. But if you are in a jesting humor —"

"A thousand pardons," said the other, seating himself in the carved oak library chair. "That's one for each of your pounds. But there, forgive me and I will be serious. I received your note late because I did not reach home until dinner time. But here I am within half an hour of reading your message. Now, then, about this thousand pounds sterling. You are sure that the money is in this room?"

"Therein lies the mystery. I had it in my hands this morning and within a few minutes it had vanished."

"Seemed to have vanished, I presume you mean."

"There was no seeming about it. It was a single bank note and I placed it on this table. Five minutes later it had disappeared."

"Disappeared is a better word by long odds. That it passed out of your sight I can believe. The question is, how was this disappearance managed, for I do not believe that it was accidental. From what you say I deduce that two or more persons besides yourself were present at the time of said disappearance of said bank note. Am I correct?"

"There were three, but really I can't see how you guessed there was more than one person with me."

"It cannot be otherwise. Had there been only one person in the room with you, you would know absolutely that he took the note. That you have a doubt as to the identity of the culprit shows that you suspect one of two or more persons."

"Mitchel, I am delighted that I sent for you. You are exactly the man who will recover this money."

"What about Barnes? You mentioned his name."

"Yes, naturally my first thought was to send for a detective, and I remembered him in connection with that ruby robbery of yours which occurred at my house. He is now following a clue which he considers a good one, and will report during the evening."

"Good! Nothing would please me better than to succeed where Barnes fails. Every time I outwit him it is a feather in my cap, and another argument in favor of my theory that the professional detective is a much overrated genius — but to your story, and be sure that you relate the exact circumstances of the affair."

As he finished speaking and leaned back in the padded library chair, the man's dark, clear-cut profile looked that of a scholar, an artist, anything but that of a detective. And indeed Mr. Robert Leroy Mitchel was both scholar and artist, — none the less so because of late years he had turned his trained powers of analysis to the study of crime and its motives, and to unraveling, as an amateur, certain mysterious offenses against the law, which had baffled the professional detective.

From cases involving life, death, millions of money or the jewels of a kingdom to the disappearance of a thousand-pound note might, indeed, have seemed a descent to the ordinary detective. Not so, however, to Mr. Mitchel, who valued mystery not in proportion to the sum involved, but to the opportunity it gave for the exercise of subtle analysis. And certainly such opportunities seemed abundantly promised by the narrative whose details Mr. Van Rawlston now unfolded for the first time.

"Some thirty years or more ago," began Mr. Van Rawlston, "there came into my office a young Englishman, who introduced himself as Thomas Eggleston. The object of his visit was curious. He wished to borrow four thousand dollars upon collateral, which proved to be an English bank note for one thousand pounds; an odd request considering that he could have changed his note for American currency, but he explained that for sentimental reasons he did not wish to part with the note permanently. His expectation was to redeem it in the future, and to keep it as a memento, — the foundation of the fortune which he hoped to earn in this land."

"A singular wish," interrupted Mr. Mitchel.

"I should say so. Naturally my interest was keenly aroused. I agreed to advance the sum demanded, without charge. Moreover, I put him in the way of some speculations that turned out so well that it was not long before the thousand-pound note was back in his possession. Since then we have been close friends. I have visited him almost daily in this house, and when he died a few days ago, I was not surprised to find that he had named me as executor of his large estate."

"And the heirs?"

"I am coming to them presently. My friend died very unexpectedly," continued Mr. Van Rawlston. "Last Saturday he was well, and on Monday, dead. Wednesday morning, the day of the funeral, his man of business brought me his client's will, and as the executor I appointed this morning for reading it, here in the library, to the family. This consisted of but two

members. One was Alice Hetheridge, the daughter of a sister of Eggleston's who had accompanied him to this country and married here. As both Mrs. Hetheridge and her husband had died while their daughter was still a little girl, Alice had been brought up as her uncle's child, and it was expected would inherit his fortune. The only other relative present was Robert Eggleston, the nephew of the deceased, but practically a stranger to him, as he had never been in this country nor even seen his uncle until he took up his abode in this house about three months ago."

"But you have mentioned only two relatives, and I understood you to say there was a third person present."

"And so there was. When I came I was surprised to find here Arthur Lumley, a young New Yorker, of whom I know nothing except that he is in love with Alice. But as Alice took me aside and explained that she had invited him, I was silenced.

"Now I come to the events of the day."

"Kindly be as explicit as possible," said Mr. Mitchel. "Omit no detail, however trifling."

"When we four had taken our places at this table I asked Alice, as being familiar with the house, to bring me a certain box named in the will. This she did. It was locked, the key having been brought to me with the will. Unlocking it, I took out a packet containing a bank note for a thousand pounds; the same upon which I had once loaned money. There were also some government bonds and railway securities. Having compared them with the list attached to the will, I then read aloud the testament of my dead friend. A part of this I will read to you as possibly shedding some light on the situation."

"One moment," interposed Mr. Mitchel; "you said that the packet taken from the box contained the bank note as well as the bonds and other securities. Are you sure the note was there?"

"Oh, yes! I found it first and placed it on the table in front of me, while I went through the papers and read the will. By this document, Robert Eggleston was made the heir of practically all his property, — a division that would have seemed decidedly unfair had it not been for the following paragraph."

Mr. Van Rawlston then proceeded to read an extract from the will, in which Eggleston explained why his beloved niece Alice was not made his heiress. In detail the writer related how, when he was a very young man,

he had been left dependent on his half brother William, a man of wealth, ten years his senior; how this brother had paid his passage to this country and presented him with a thousand-pound note, on which the young fortune seeker had borrowed the money that became the nest egg of his present large estate; how William would never consent to a return of the money, though his brother had preserved the original note with that end in view; and how, finally, the older brother had died suddenly, killed by the sweeping away of his entire fortune by unlucky speculation. The writer further stated that before his death William had given his son Robert a letter to his American uncle, claiming for that son a share of the fortune resulting from his father's gift.

In concluding, the writer said: —

"I took Robert into my home, and I am bound to say that I have not learned to love him. This, however, may be a prejudice, due to the fact that he had come between me and my wish to make Alice my heiress. In recognition of the possibility of this prejudice I feel compelled to ease my conscience by bequeathing to William's son the fortune which grew out of William's bounty. The original bank note, however, was a free gift to me, and I certainly may dispose of it as I please. I ask my niece Alice to accept it from me, as all that my conscience permits me to call my own."

"An interesting and curious statement," commented Mr. Mitchel. "Now tell me about the disappearance of the note."

"There is my difficulty. I have so little to tell. After reading the will, I laid it down, and reached out my hand, intending to give the bank note to Alice, whereupon I discovered that it had disappeared."

"Tell me exactly where each person was seated."

"We were all at this table, which you see is small. I sat at this end, Alice at my right hand, young Eggleston at my left, and Lumley opposite me."

"So that all three were easily within reach of the bank note when you placed it upon the table? That complicates matters. Well, when you discovered that you could not find the note, who spoke first and what comment was made?"

"I cannot be certain. I was stunned, and the others seemed as much surprised as I was. I remember that Eggleston asked Alice whether she had picked it up, adding, 'It is yours, you know.' But she made an indignant denial. Lumley said nothing, but sat looking at us as though seeking an explanation. Then I recall that Eggleston made the very practical suggestion

that if each person in the room were searched and the note not found it would thus be proven that it had merely been blown from the table by some draught, in which case a thorough search should discover it. Once before, you may remember, I declined to have my guests searched, to my sorrow. It was at the time of the ruby robbery, when the suggestor himself had the jewel. Therefore when Eggleston made this suggestion I began with him. The search was thorough, I assure you, but I found nothing. I had as little success with Lumley, and I even examined my own pockets, with the vague hope that I might have inadvertently put the note in one of them. But all my looking was in vain."

"Might not one of these men have secreted the bank note elsewhere, and then have possessed himself of it after your search?"

"I took care to prevent that. As soon as I had gone through Eggleston, I unceremoniously bundled him out of the room. I did the same with Lumley, and neither has been allowed in here since."

"What about the young lady?"

"It would be absurd to suspect her. The note was her property. Still she insisted upon my searching her, and I examined her pocket. Of course I found nothing."

"Ah! You examined only her pocket. Well, under the circumstances, I suppose that was all you could do. Thus, having sent the three persons out of the room, you think that the bank note is still here. A natural deduction, only I wish that the woman might have been more thoroughly searched. By the way, you said that Mr. Barnes assisted you in examining the room for the note. What view does he take of the case?"

Before Mr. Van Rawlston could reply there was a sharp ring at the door bell, and a moment later Mr. Barnes himself was ushered in, by his appearance completing a trio often before met together for the unraveling of mysteries.

As usual, his coming was the signal for a battle of wits between the professional detective and the expert criminologist, each bent on demonstrating the superiority of his method.

Today the detective seemed for the time in the ascendant. With what appeared the authority of knowledge, he ridiculed Mr. Mitchel's theory that the case was a complex one, and proceeded, point by point, to state the steps that led to his view of the case.

They were, first, that the note was either mislaid or stolen; second, that

if mislaid it would have been found, and that therefore it was stolen; third, that if stolen it was taken by one of the three persons; and fourth, that as one of the three owned the note, and another had just heard of the inheritance of a large fortune, the third by necessity came under suspicion.

To this conclusion, however, Mr. Mitchel, acquiescent up to this point, took strong exceptions. For in the first place, he said, people had been known to steal their own goods; in the second place, rich men were often thieves; and in the third place, Mr. Lumley, being in love with the owner of the note, was as unlikely to steal it as was she herself. One point only he would concede, that Lumley might have stolen the note before he heard that his sweetheart was to inherit it; in which case, of course, he might have desired to return it and yet not had the opportunity. In that event, however, the question arose how he could get out of the room with the stolen property.

"He must have hidden it elsewhere than in his pocket," said Mr. Barnes. "Remember that you cannot thoroughly search a man in the presence of a lady. At any rate I have strong grounds for believing that he stole the note, as you shall hear."

His narrative seemed indeed to support his theory beyond the shadow of doubt. For by following Mr. Lumley, after he had left the house, he had discovered that this impecunious lover of Alice Hetheridge went straight to his employer and resigned his position, and then betook himself to a business agency where he obtained an option to purchase a partnership in a good concern, agreeing to pay five thousand dollars for the same. From there Mr. Barnes had tracked him to the New York Central Station, whence the young man had left the city about two hours before.

"What his destination was I don't know," the detective concluded, "but one of my men who was stationed there is following him, and will report to me in" — pulling out his watch — "in half an hour, so I have no time to lose."

As the detective left the room, Mr. Mitchel, unruffled by Mr. Barnes's apparent victory, turned to his friend with a strange request. This was no other than that he might spend the night in the library that had been the scene of the strange robbery, and that his presence should be concealed from Eggleston and Miss Hetheridge.

Van Rawlston looked at his friend inquiringly.

"I see," he said finally, "you wish to make a search on your own account, eh? Very good; I will arrange it. And, by the way, as there's to be an auction

sale of the library tomorrow — Eggleston had arranged for it before his death — you'll see the necessity of settling this mystery as soon as possible. Meantime, as it's nine o'clock and I need rest, I'll go home, meeting you here in the morning."

Before going, however, Mr. Van Rawlston took time to find out that Eggleston was not in the house and that Miss Hetheridge was in her room. Then he dismissed the servant and locked Mr. Mitchel in the library. Next he went upstairs to Miss Hetheridge, told her that he had thought best to lock the library door, and bade her good night. Passing out to the street, he handed the door key to Mr. Mitchel through the front window.

Left thus alone in a strange house, Mr. Mitchel dropped into an easy chair and began to analyze the situation. He did not light the gas, as that would have betrayed his presence, but the glowing grate fire shed light enough for him to get the lay of the land, to note that the long library occupied the whole of one side of the house, the parlors being on the opposite side of the hallway, and that the windows in front overlooked the street, and at the back opened upon a small yard. He even took the pains to find out that just below these back windows stood a shed, the roof of an extension which served as a laundry.

Then returning to his seat, Mr. Mitchel went over in his mind the incidents which had been related to him, and two of his conclusions are worthy of note here.

"Barnes argues," thought he, "that Lumley may have taken the bank note before he knew that it had been bequeathed to his sweetheart. But the same holds good with the girl herself, and might well explain her stealing what was really her own property. That is one point worth bearing in mind, but the best of all is my scheme for finding the note itself. Why should I trouble myself with a search which might occupy me all night, when by waiting I may see the thief take the note from its present hiding place, always supposing that it is in this room? Decidedly patience is a virtue in this instance, and I have only to wait."

A couple of hours later, Mr. Mitchel started up from a slight doze, and realized that he had been disturbed, though at first he could not tell by what. Then he heard a sound which indicated that someone was fitting a key into the lock. Perhaps the thief was coming! This thought awakened him to his full faculties, and he quickly hid among the folds of some heavy draperies which served upon occasion to divide the room into two apart-

ments. The door opened, and he heard the stealthy tread of soft footsteps, though at first the figure of the intruder was hidden from his view by the draperies which surrounded him. In a few moments his suspense was at an end. A young woman, of girlish figure, passed by him and went over to the fireplace. She was in a dainty night-robe, her long black hair hanging in waving masses down her back. She leaned against the mantel and gazed into the fire without moving for some minutes, and then, turning suddenly, crossed the room, going directly to one of the bookshelves. Here she paused, then took down several books which she placed upon a chair near by. Her back was towards Mr. Mitchel, but he could see her reach into the recess with her arm, which was bared by the act, the loose sleeve of her gown falling aside. Then there was a clicking sound just perceptible to the ear, and Mr. Mitchel muttered to himself: —

"A secret closet, with a spring catch."

In another moment the girl was replacing the books, and, this done, she hurried from the library, locking the door after her. Mr. Mitchel emerged from his hiding place, and going to the shelf where the girl had been, removed the books and searched for the spring which would unlock the secret compartment. It was not easily found; but Mr. Mitchel was a patient and persistent man, and after nearly an hour discovered the way of moving a sliding panel, and took an envelope from the recess behind. Carrying this to the fireplace, he dropped to his knees, and withdrawing its contents, held in his hand a Bank of England note for one thousand pounds. He looked at it, smiled, and said in a low tone: —

"And Mr. Barnes was so certain that he would catch the thief!" Then he smiled again, replaced the books on the shelf, decided that the large sofa might serve as a comfortable bed, and so went to sleep.

He was awakened early, by a sense of cold. Starting up, for a moment dazed by his unfamiliar surroundings, he gazed first at the gray ashes of the dead fire in the grate, and then looked towards the windows thickly covered with frost, and shivered. Remembering where he was, he threw his arms about, and walked up and down the long room to start his blood moving, and induce a little warmth. Presently he went to the back windows and looked at the beautiful arabesques of frost, which resembled long fern leaves. Suddenly he seemed unusually interested, and especially attracted to one of the panes. He examined this closely, and taking a notebook from his pocket made a rapid sketch of the pattern on the glass. Then he raised

the sash, looked out upon the shed, and emitted a low whistle. Next he stepped out through the window, went down on his hands and knees upon the tinned roof, and looked closely at something which he saw there. Returning to the room, he proceeded to the most curious act of all. He again opened the secret panel, replaced the envelope containing the bank note, and seated himself at the table where Mr. Van Rawlston claimed that the note had vanished, and in the chair where Mr. Van Rawlston had been when he read the will.

Several hours later, when Mr. Van Rawlston came in, Mr. Mitchel was sitting in the same chair looking through a Bible.

"Well," said Mr. Van Rawlston, "how did you pass the night? Did the thief pay you a visit?"

"I think so," replied Mr. Mitchel.

"Then you know who took the note?" asked Mr. Van Rawlston eagerly.

"Perhaps! I do not like to jump at conclusions. This is a magnificent Bible, Mr. Van Rawlston. Is it in the sale today? If so, I will bid on it."

"Oh, yes, it is to be sold," replied Mr. Van Rawlston testily. He thought Mr. Mitchel merely wished to change the subject, and at that moment he was more interested in bank notes than in Bibles. He had no idea that Mr. Mitchel really coveted the Bible. But then he did not know that Mr. Mitchel collected books as well as gems.

He was therefore much astonished, some hours later, when the auction was in progress, to find Mr. Mitchel not only bidding on the Bible, but bidding heavily.

At first the bidding was spiritless, and the price rose slowly until Mr. Mitchel made an offer of five hundred dollars. After a moment's hesitation young Eggleston bid fifty dollars more, and it was seen that the contest was now between him and Mr. Mitchel. Bidding fifty dollars at a time they had advanced the price to nine hundred dollars, when Eggleston remarked: —

"I bid nine fifty," then turned to Mr. Mitchel and added: —

"This is a family relic, sir, and I hope you will not raise me again."

"This is an open sale, I believe," said Mr. Mitchel, bowing coldly. "I offer a thousand dollars."

At this moment Mr. Barnes entered the room, accompanied by a short young man, and Mr. Mitchel's attention seemed attracted away from the Bible. The auctioneer, noticing this, called him by name and asked if he wished to bid again.

"One moment, please," said Mr. Mitchel. "May I look again at the volume?"

It was passed to him, and he appeared to scrutinize it closely, started slightly as though making a discovery, and handed it back, saying: —

"I have made a mistake. I supposed that this was a genuine Soncino, but I find that it is only a reprint." Then he turned to Eggleston with a curious smile and said, "You may have the family relic. I shall not bid against you."

The auction over, the crowd dispersed, and when all strangers had departed, Mr. Mitchel nodded meaningly to Mr. Barnes, and approached young Eggleston, who was tying up the Bible in paper. Touching him upon the arm he said very quietly: —

"Mr. Eggleston, I must ask the officer here to arrest you!"

Eggleston's hands quivered over the knot, and he seemed too agitated to speak. The detective, realizing that Mr. Mitchel had solved the problem, quickly stepped closer to Eggleston.

"What does this mean?" asked Mr. Van Rawlston.

"Call Miss Hetheridge and I will explain," said Mr. Mitchel.

"No! No! Not before her!" cried Eggleston, breaking down completely. "I confess I loved Alice and wished to make it impossible for her to marry Lumley. The note is here! Here, in the Bible. I stole it and hid it there!" With nervous fingers he tore off the wrapping, and rapidly turning the pages searched for the note. "Heavens! It is not here!" He looked at Mr. Mitchel anxiously.

"No! It is not there. You paid too much for that Bible. Mr. Van Rawlston, I prefer to have the lady called, if you please."

Mr. Van Rawlston left the room, and Mr. Mitchel addressed Mr. Barnes.

"By the way, Barnes, have you abandoned your theory?"

"I suppose I must now, though I had not up to a moment ago. By the aid of my man I found Mr. Lumley, and accused him of the theft. He would offer no explanation, but willingly agreed to return with me."

"We seem to have arrived just in time," said Mr. Lumley quietly.

"In the very nick of time, as you shall hear," said Mr. Mitchel. "Ah! Here is Miss Hetheridge. Will you be seated, please, Miss Hetheridge." He bowed courteously as the young woman sat down, and then proceeded.

"I did not think that the bank note had been removed from this room. Why? Because I argued that the theft and the hiding must have necessarily occupied but a moment; a chosen moment when the attention of all three

others was attracted away from the table where it lay. The one chance was that Miss Hetheridge might have hidden it in the folds of her gown. The men's pockets seemed too inaccessible. I agreed with Mr. Barnes that the lady would scarcely steal what was her own, though even that was possible if she did not know that it was to be hers. For a similar reason, I did not suspect Mr. Lumley, and thus by elimination, there was but one person left upon whom to fasten suspicion. I supposed he would return here during the night to recover the bank note, and I remained in this room to watch for him."

At this Miss Hetheridge made a movement of her lips as though about to speak, but no words escaped, and she shrank back in her chair.

"During the night," proceeded Mr. Mitchel, "Miss Hetheridge came into this room and hid something. After she had left the room, relocking the door with a duplicate key, I found what she had hidden. It was a one-thousand-pound note."

There was silence for a moment, then Miss Hetheridge cried out: —

"I can explain!"

"That is why I sent for you," said Mr. Mitchel.

"The note was my own," said the girl, speaking rapidly, "but after the disappearance of the other I was afraid to have it in my room lest it be found, and seem to inculpate me. I received it only a few days before my dear uncle died. He told me that his brother William had sent it as a present to my mother upon her marriage, but as he had doubted the good intentions of my father, he had kept the matter a secret. As both my parents died, he had held the note in trust for me. He did not invest it, because he thought that his own fortune would be an ample legacy to leave me. A short time before he died I passed my twenty-first birthday, and he gave me the note. That is the whole truth."

"To which I can testify," interjected Mr. Lumley. "And I may now add that Miss Hetheridge had not only promised to be my wife, but she offered me the use of her money to buy the partnership, which to Mr. Barnes seemed such a suspicious act."

"I have only to explain, then," continued Mr. Mitchel, "how it was that I decided that Miss Hetheridge was not a thief. This morning I found heavy frost on the windowpanes. Upon one, however, I noticed a circular, transparent spot, where the pattern of the frosting had been obliterated. Instantly I comprehended what had occurred. The thief, the real thief, had

come in the night, or rather in the morning, for I know almost the hour. He stood upon the shed outside, and melted the frost by breathing upon the pane, with his mouth close to the glass. Thus making a peep-hole, he must have seen me asleep on the sofa, and so knew that it would be useless for him to attempt an entrance. As the person who did this trick stood upon the shed, I had but to measure the distance from the shed to his peep-hole to be able to guess his height, which I estimated to be more than six feet. Next there was some very interesting evidence in the frost on the tin roof, — the marks made by the man's feet, or his heels rather, for the frost was so light that only the impressions of the nails in the heels would show. My own made complete little horseshoe-shaped marks, composed of dots. But those of my predecessor were scarcely more than half a curve, which proved that he walks on the side of his foot, thus slightly lifting the opposite side from the ground, or roof, as it was in this instance. This much decided me that Miss Hetheridge was not the thief, and I returned her bank note to the place where she had hidden it. Then I sat at the table where the will was read, and studied the situation. The easiest way to hide the note quickly seemed to be to slip it into the Bible which stood on the table. Therefore I was not surprised when I found the bank note, which I have here."

He drew forth the bank note from his pocket and handed it to Mr. Van Rawlston, who asked: —

"But why, then, did you try to buy the Bible?"

"I had no idea of doing so. You forget that I had not seen Mr. Lumley. He, too, might have been six feet high, and he, too, might have had the habit of walking on the side of his heel, as I quickly observed that Mr. Eggleston does. With only one of the men before me I decided to run up the price of the Bible, knowing that if he were guilty he would bid over me. Mr. Eggleston followed my lead, and I was almost sure of his guilt until he made the remark that he was buying a family relic. It was a possible truth, and I was obliged to go on bidding to see how anxious he was to possess the volume. Then, as I said awhile ago, Mr. Lumley arrived in the nick of time. One glance at his short stature, and I was ready to let the Bible go."

"You said you could almost tell the hour at which this man peeped through the window," said Mr. Barnes.

"Ah, I see! You want me to teach you tricks in your own trade, eh? Well, frost forms on the windowpane when the thermometer is near or below thirty-two. On the wall here I found a recording thermometer, which dis-

closes the fact that at three o'clock this morning the temperature was as high as forty-five, while at four it was below thirty. Frost began to form between those hours. At five it was so cold, twenty degrees, that I awoke. Our man must have come between half-past four and five. Had he come before then, his peep-hole would have been fully covered again with frost, whereas it was but thinly iced over, the mere freezing of the water of the melted frost, there being no design, or pattern, as there was over every other part of the windowpane. So I may offer you a new version of an old saw, and say that, 'Frost shows which way a thief goes.' "

A MINUTE MYSTERY

The Case of the Laundry Ticket *by Roy Post and Austin Ripley*

The gay tune that Dolly Shaw hummed as she prepared for bed ended in a choking, gasping death rattle.

* * *

"Good night, sweetheart." Clare Young hung up the receiver, turned. The scream died in her throat. There was no clue.

* * *

"I'll *never*, *never* forget his face, Professor!" near victim Lorna Lubin cried.

That Friday night the killer did leave a clue. During his struggle with Lorna a billfold bearing the name, Dirk Frost and containing a laundry ticket and an address book, fell from his pocket.

* * *

Saturday morning: "Here's Miss Lubin's description, men. Now bring that snake in here *today!*" thundered Inspector Kelley.

"I'm sorry, Professor," said the Imperial Laundry clerk, "But last Wednesday was an awfully busy day and I just don't remember the appearance of the man who left these two shirts due on this ticket."

* * *

"Yeah, that's my billfold," snarled Dirk Frost, when the police picked him up Saturday night. "I been sleepin' in the parks for a month. Ten days ago some guy rolled me durin' the night. Say . . . ! If you found my billfold in that dame's room, then the guy that stole it from me — it had two bucks in it — must be the mug who's been doin' all this killin'."

"So that," bellowed Kelley, "is your story, eh?"

"Yeah. And you gotta *prove* yours. I don't. And *you* know how long that Lubin dame's identification will stand up in court!"

"You," said Fordney, "have already disproved your own story. You, Frost, are headed for the chair!"

What clue {in addition to her identification} proved Frost had attacked Lorna?

Solution

Frost's presence in Lorna's room was proved by the laundry ticket. She was attacked on Friday night; Frost's shirts had been left at the laundry the preceding Wednesday, yet he claimed he lost his billfold, containing the ticket, TEN DAYS BEFORE the Saturday on which he was apprehended! Frost was electrocuted for the two murders to which he confessed.

At least twice we have gone on record as averse to publishing the so-called "short short" story, and twice we have published them. In the tradition of inconsistency, we now publish still another — Miss Chessman's most ingenious "Accused." A powerful vignette never before published anywhere.

ACCUSED

by RUTH CHESSMAN

MICHAEL CARRIDAY pressed the bell marked "Prentiss."

What shall I do? he wondered as he waited. I can't ask her outright. I can't say, "Madam, I've come courting — but first tell me if you turned on the gas which killed your husband?"

If Mrs. Prentiss were innocent — and he wouldn't be here at all if he didn't half think so — such an attitude would ruin his chances.

Stella, the fat maid who opened the door, looked at him dubiously. "Ain't you the district attorney?" she asked.

"Not today," he reassured her. "I'm plain Mr. Carriday today. Will you tell Mrs. Prentiss I'm here?"

Stella stood firm, with the air of a faithful servant who knows what liberties she may take.

"You've bothered Mrs. Prentiss enough," she said. "The verdict said not guilty, and that's the truth. She ain't going to be bothered no more."

Michael said patiently, "I'm just here as a friend." He paused and lowered his voice. "Mrs. Prentiss is a beautiful woman, you know, and she was very brave through the whole messy business. A man remembers those things."

And that was true — a man did remember a tremolo smile, a pair of pain-filled eyes, a dainty head held proudly. Then, unhappily, he remembered something else. In his mind he saw the kitchen . . . the fat old man on the floor of the gas-filled room.

"Just tell her I'm here," he said again.

"Come with me," Stella said, as if making up her mind and preceded him into the living room.

Michael sat down. The way the chair was placed, he could see the closed door to the kitchen. He got up and changed his seat.

He was not ordinarily finicky about death — a man in his position could not afford to be. He did not turn a hair when he examined, as he frequently had to, a mutilated body. But there was something insidious about gas. It was so harmless, yet so deadly. If he were to commit suicide, he thought, it would be by a bullet, or by drowning — certainly not by gas.

Mrs. Prentiss came into the room. She was wearing a housecoat of pale blue satin and lace. She looked very young; he realized again that she must have been thirty years younger than the paunchy — and dead — Mr. Prentiss.

"Stella tells me you've come as a friend," she said. When she smiled, a little warm wave of pleasure ran through him. She sat down next to him, turning deliberately so that she, too, sat with her back to the kitchen. She was refreshingly lovely, now that the strain was over, and she looked at him with guileless directness.

How had he ever doubted her for a moment? And yet, on the heels of that thought came another: If Mrs. Prentiss were as fat as her husband had been, would Michael still wonder? Or would he be convinced that, with a single quick gesture, she had turned on the gas-cock in the kitchen?

He looked involuntarily at the slender, rounded arms, and so vividly did he picture it that he could almost see the fatal twist of the wrist, could almost hear the hiss of escaping gas, could almost smell it again. If what he feared were true, how could he accept a jury's verdict of not guilty? Certainly not for the woman he hoped — yes, he almost dared hope — to make his wife.

"You're going to stay here?" he asked, looking about him, but avoiding the kitchen door.

" No," she said, shaking her head. "I couldn't. I'm going away for a month or so. Then I'll see."

He couldn't bear the thought of having her gone for so long. He wanted to tell her so, almost did, but his Vermont hard-headedness held him back.

The maid came in with a batch of letters.

"More of them notes, I guess," she said proudly.

Mrs. Prentiss explained to Michael: "Notes of condolence. Notes of congratulation, too, that the State decided I'm not a murderess."

Her voice caught, and a quick sympathy welled up in him. "Tell me yourself," he said hurriedly, carried beyond caution. "Let me hear you say it. I must hear you say you didn't do it."

Her nostrils dilated with quick scorn. "What makes you think I care how you feel, Mr. Carriday?" She fussed with the letters in her hand. "You needn't stop to say goodbye. Stella will show you out."

"I said it badly," he cried. "Naturally you don't care how I feel — yet. I believe all the evidence. I want to believe it. Don't you see? I just want you to tell me yourself. Just say, 'Michael, I didn't do it,' and I'll never question it or think of it again. And then I'll make you care that I care. I swear it. I'll make you forget every cruel moment you've spent in the last month."

She looked up from the letters which she had been sorting with quick, nervous gestures. Her head lifted proudly.

"I don't believe you," she said. She held up the letters. "I've been getting letters like this every day. And not one questions my innocence. That was left for the man who says he loves me." Her contempt stung him.

"There isn't anyone who cares the way I do!"

"Any one of these people cares more," she said hotly. "Perfect strangers, too." She pulled out a letter at random. "Take this one. You'll find no veiled accusations here."

She tore the envelope open angrily. Instead of a letter, there fell out a printed slip of paper. Mrs. Prentiss looked up quickly. Her face twitched, and became white, and before Michael could understand, she fainted.

Stella flew to her mistress. Michael tried to slip by her, to obtain the paper which Mrs. Prentiss still held in her lax grasp. But Stella, mingling abuse of him with her endearments for the unconscious woman, made him keep his distance.

Mrs. Prentiss opened her eyes slowly, but recoiled at the sight of him.

"Get out," she said in a whisper. Her face was set and colorless.

Stella seconded her mistress's command. "You better go now," she warned him.

"As you wish," Michael said. Now was his opportunity! He moved quickly by Stella, and bent over Mrs. Prentiss to say his goodbye. The paper that had caused her to faint lay in plain sight.

Michael looked at it, and knew why Mrs. Prentiss had fainted.

It was the gas bill.

He felt a little faint himself.

Introducing Loreto Santos, the wealthy Argentinian who turned dilettante detective, and who was the constant wonder of his friend, Inspector Comfort of the C.I.D. in London. . . . Here is an exploit of Santos's, in which cold deduction solves the problem of "the locked, barred door" — one of the most fascinating themes in all detective fiction.

THE DIARY OF DEATH

by MARTEN CUMBERLAND

"CONFESS, my brother," said Cleta, "that you are just a little bit of a crank. You refuse to help Inspector Comfort in most of his important cases, and yet I have known you give a whole week to some trumpery affair of a broken-down actor."

She sat down her empty coffee-cup upon the breakfast table, and rose to get a cigarette.

"Your attitude towards life is paradoxical," she accused him.

Loreto Santos twirled round upon the music-stool and looked at his beautiful sister with laughter in his light grey eyes.

"Paradoxical!" he repeated. "Well — perhaps. But time turns our most outlandish paradoxes into truisms. When you speak of my attitude towards life you really refer to my position with regard to crime. That is very simple. Like all the best thinkers on the subject, I am concerned only with prevention, and never, or seldom, with punishment. I don't believe in social revenge. Anyway, *chiquita*, my interest in crime is purely intellectual. If I can outwit and frustrate the criminal, I am interested; if the crime is already committed, I am bored. Why should I — a man of absurd wealth — play the part of policeman? No, I leave that to friend Comfort, and I go my own sweet way. As for the 'Death Diary' murders, they interest me, but I want a holiday. We are due at Lady Groombridge's next week, and Comfort must play the sleuth by himself. *Voilà tout.*"

He turned to the piano with a shrug of his broad shoulders, as though he dismissed the whole discussion. Soon there flowed from beneath his fingers the majestic swelling strains of a choral prelude by Bach.

Cleta Santos leant back in a deep armchair, and, whilst listening appreciatively to the music, gazed with a certain wonder at her brother's broad back.

Loreto was continually a source of perplexity to his sister, and to most of the people who came in contact with him. Born in the Argentine of Spanish parents, Loreto had been educated in England, and on the death of his parents he had made his home in Europe.

With his sister, who was many years younger than himself, Loreto had lived in several European capitals before finally settling down in London in the big house overlooking Regent's Park. Here his vast wealth and various gifts, intellectual and artistic, together with Cleta's beauty, had made them welcome in certain charming circles of society.

At first Loreto had lived merely as a dilettante, a fine amateur pianist who patronized various arts; then by mere chance his attention had been drawn to a certain notorious crime, and his great gifts as a criminologist had come to light.

Subsequently he had interested himself considerably in crime — crime, that is, as a battle of wits. A kind of chess problem to be worked out — and always Santos was concerned only with the anticipation of criminal events.

The man, too, was a philanthropist of the highest order, and his vast scheme for aiding first offenders upon their liberation from prison had cost him thousands. His attitude towards the criminal was, in fact, most humane, though it never degenerated into the sentimental.

Cleta, listening to his music, smiled to herself. She knew that Loreto's mind was not entirely absorbed by his playing, for upon the otherwise bare music-holder was propped a newspaper, and it was folded at the latest report of what had become known as the "Death Diary Murders."

* * *

It was inevitable that the conversation at Lady Groombridge's dinner-table should turn upon the "Death Diary Murders." The newspapers were full of the affair at the time, and probably regretted having used up their superlatives on so many minor events.

"Of course the murderer must be mad, and poor Lilian Hope was undoubtedly insane in her declining years," declared Lady Groombridge, glaring round the table.

Lady Groombridge was one of those strong but by no means silent women whose views are invariably decided, especially when they are incorrect.

"These murders are the blind, unreasoning crimes of a lunatic," she resumed. "They are without motive, and that is why they have baffled the police. The very cunning of them is the cunning of a lunatic." Her keen eyes

roved around the table, and fell upon Loreto Santos. "Don't you agree with me, Mr. Santos?" she urged. "You are the expert upon these dreadful matters."

Loretto nodded gravely.

"I think most murderers are mad," he said. "Certainly this vendetta and these killings are insensate. There is no faintest reason for such revenge. I have seen the pages torn from poor Lilian Hope's diary, and obviously what she wrote was merely the outpourings of a bitter and disappointed woman — a woman beside herself with illness, poverty, and suffering. There was no truth in the accusations she brought against people who had always been her loyal friends."

A little murmur ran round the table at his words, and a voice, speaking English with a slight French accent, broke out with a question:

"Who was Lilian Hope, and what exactly are these murders you speak of?"

The questioner was Otisse — Henri Otisse, the explorer, who had just returned from the upper reaches of the Amazon. His small, dark head and yellow, sun-scorched face was turned inquiringly around, and immediately a storm of verbal explanation broke out from the assembled diners.

Through all this buzzing, Lady Groombridge's resolute voice boomed out, and dispersed the others as a motor-horn scatters a flock of roadside chickens.

"My dear Mr. Otisse," she exclaimed, "you are probably the only man in England who doesn't know the whole pitiable story. Poor Lilian Hope was once one of our famous English beauties. She was a musical comedy singer, and though her voice was not really fine, her loveliness made one forget that. She was one of the first to have a picture postcard vogue, though she must have been nearly forty at that time. People would wait hours to see her get into her carriage, she was so popular. She had many exalted friends and walked with kings, and yet at the end she disappeared into obscurity and direst poverty. Some say she sold flowers in Piccadilly. It is true that she died in a miserable garret, where she had lived for years under another name."

"But her diary?" asked Otisse, pulling at his small dark moustache. "This diary that they call in the journals the 'Diary of Death' — how did she come to write that, and to whom did she leave it?"

"That is the mystery," announced Lady Groombridge. "Lilian Hope died in such obscurity that it has been impossible so far to trace the few miserable possessions that she left behind. In her last years she apparently kept a diary

in which she poured out vindictive and bitter accusations against her former friends. She stated that these friends had abandoned her, scorned her, refused her the slightest assistance.

"Of course, the poor woman was beside herself with illness and want. Her friends would have helped her if they had known where she was. Lilian Hope's wild accusations were without foundation, but they have resulted in terrible consequences. Somehow, her diary has come into the possession of an avenger, a man — if it is a man — more insane than poor Lilian Hope ever was."

Henri Otisse nodded quickly.

"I read a little in the journals," he said. "Someone has already killed two of these people said to have refused aid to Lilian Hope, *n'est-ce pas?*"

Lady Groombridge sipped her wine and glared at her attentive guests.

"Yes. Already two worthy and respectable people have been struck down by this unknown madman. Two have been killed in three months. Dr. Stapleton Clarke, a fine old man and a real philanthropist, was found shot in his study, and beside him was a page torn from Lilian Hope's diary; a page in which she accused the poor man, in the wildest language, of callous indifference to her sufferings, and refusal to give her financial assistance. As though the old doctor would refuse anyone help, least of all a woman with whom he had once been upon terms of friendship! The writing found beside that old man's body was hysterical and insane.

"The same thing applies to the murder of poor old Isidore Gorden. He was for years the manager of the Beaumont Theatre, and a kinder man never lived, yet he was found stabbed in the garden of his house at Maidenhead, and an equally hysterical accusation, torn from the fatal diary, lay upon his body. Apparently, too, Gorden had received pages of the 'Death Diary' — as the papers call it — several times before he died. Undoubtedly they were sent by the murderer to his victim, and they were enclosed in common envelopes addressed with a typewriter."

"And others are threatened?" asked Otisse. "Has this mad avenger sent other diary pages to fresh victims?"

"One can't tell," replied his hostess. "Dr. Stapleton Clarke probably received pages of the diary, and it is thought he destroyed them without telling anyone about it. Lilian Hope had many friends, and she may have ranted against all of them. It is terrible. There is no knowing who may be the next victim."

"So far there have only been two murders," broke in one of the women guests. "And both have been committed in the last three months. The police have a theory that Lilian Hope's diary has somehow fallen into the hands of an old lover of hers, and this man is carrying out a vendetta. They think that either this murderer has only recently acquired the 'Death Diary' or else that he has had it ever since Lilian Hope's death, and that he has recently gone out of his mind. You see, only a madman would take this hysterical diary so seriously."

Otisse demurred slightly.

"Surely a man who loved this unfortunate woman might well believe that her diary spoke the truth?" he suggested.

"Not if the man read the diary in the light of reason and common sense," said Loreto Santos. "The diary pages found in poor Gorden's desk were the outpourings of a pathological subject. These writings of Lilian Hope have been submitted to alienists and handwriting experts, and all the authorities are agreed that the poor woman was insane. The reputation of the murdered men was of the highest, and Lilian Hope, if she had been in her right mind, would never have accused her friends as she did. This murderer, of course, is mad."

"Of course," echoed Lady Groombridge. "The whole thing is a terrible tragedy. One wonders who will be next upon this mad creature's list. There is Sir George Frame, who is joining our party to-night — he couldn't arrive in time for dinner — now, who knows, he may be a future victim. Poor old man, he is seventy-two years of age, but he was a close friend of Lilian Hope."

* * *

Presently the long formal dinner was at an end, and Lady Groombridge rose from the table, carrying the women with her. In the billiard-room the men lit their cigars, and Loreto looked about him curiously. Lady Groombridge was a resolute hunter of London's "lions," and the guests were an interesting crowd.

There was Lionel Silk, poet and author of *White Heat*, which had been publicly burned in America, and now cost fourteen guineas a volume. He was a slim, mild-looking man, with a bald circle in the midst of his fair hair, and a round schoolboy's face that suggested arrested development. He looked out at the world through sleepy, lowered eyelids, and a scarlet cigarette-holder nine inches long jutted defiantly from his mouth.

Otisse, the explorer, was telling stories about China and South America to a group of men, all more or less famous or notorious. One of these was a singer named Adam Steele, "boomed" in the newspapers recently as the "Australian Caruso." Steele was a large, bounding, energetic man, broad-shouldered and full of vitality. He had a very beautiful voice, and later, no doubt, he would be expected to sing. Lady Groombridge did not invite her guests for nothing.

Steele strolled across the room and seated himself beside Loreto. The singer had some music in his hands, and he turned to Loreto with a pleasant smile.

"I suppose I shall have to sing later on," he confided, with a humorous grin. "I'm engaged like the extra waiters and the other hirelings. I wonder whether you would mind very much playing some accompaniments for me, Santos? I know you're a big solo pianist, but the fact is my regular accompanist is ill. Lady Groombridge suggested that you might —"

"That lady's word is law," said Loreto, smiling. "Of course, I don't claim to be an accompanist, and I'm not a very good reader. What have you got there? German *Lieder* — h'm! Brahms — he's a bit tricky."

He took the music and turned the pages quickly.

"Well, I think I can manage this for you all right."

Steele thanked the other in his quick, impulsive way, and soon the two men were deep in a musical discussion. Loreto's voice was soft and gravely deliberate; Steele talked excitedly, with animated gesture.

Later, when they rejoined the women, Steele sang and Loreto played indefatigably. Not only did he play the singer's accompaniments, but he played numerous solos, and was glad afterwards to slip away to a corner of the big room for a quiet cigarette and a rest.

His sister Cleta, who had quite a nice drawing-room voice, exquisitely trained, sang some songs of old Spain, while Loreto listened appreciatively. He was sorry when the girl had finished, and Lionel Silk began to recite — or, rather, chant — some fragments from *White Heat.*

Seizing a favorable moment, Loreto slipped out and stole along a passage to a cool and empty smoking-room that adjoined the billiard-room.

* * *

He had just lit a fresh cigarette when a very tall old man, with white hair and a scholarly stoop, peered in through the doorway and then entered.

"Hullo!" said the old man, genially. "It's Santos, isn't it? Loreto Santos? Thought it was. My name's Frame. Politician, you know."

He seated himself opposite Loreto and continued in the same snappy, unconventional fashion.

"Couldn't stand that Silk fellow; slipped out after you. Calls that stuff poetry! Gad! He ought to have been burnt along with his beastly books. Rotten stuff, Santos."

With fingers that shook ever so slightly he drew out a cigar-case, whilst Loreto looked at him curiously.

At seventy-two years of age, Sir George Frame had a fine old face that still retained traces of an extremely handsome youth. The sputtering match threw a glow about the high and broad forehead, the grey eyes, still keen despite the innumerable fine lines about them, and the firm mouth. Looking at the old man's face, Loreto understood the other's popularity in the House, his reputation for shrewd statesmanship and vision.

"I'm very pleased to meet you, Sir George," he said, with perfect honesty. "I fancy that you are rather more than a mere politician."

The old man shrugged and dropped his extinguished match into an ash-tray.

"I've tried hard," he said. "I've tried hard. But the number of fools are infinite, as old Carlyle said. Anyway, it doesn't matter now. You play the piano jolly well, Santos, but the musical number for me is 'Nunc dimittis'. I've had a full life. No regrets. Seventy-three next June, but I'll never reach it. Shut the door, my boy, will you?"

A little surprised at the abruptness of the request, Loreto nevertheless rose and closed the smoke-room door securely. When he returned to his seat he noticed that Sir George Frame had moved his chair forward until it was much nearer to that of Loreto.

"Particularly wanted to have a talk with you, Santos," the old man resumed. "Followed your career in the papers, and read your views on crime frustration. Papers got your views wrong, of course, but I understand. You're quite right. Modern society is the greatest criminal of all. Distribution of wealth notoriously unjust. So-called 'justice' a mockery. Organized society makes criminals by the hundred, and then revenges itself upon them —if they're poor. Big thieves get off and get honors. All wrong. Prevention of crime is the great thing — not punishment."

He paused for a moment, and looked at the firm ash on his cigar.

"I'm particularly interested in the prevention of crime," he said, slowly, and in a different tone. "Perhaps you can guess why, Santos?"

His eyes were lifted meaningly to his listener's face, and in a flash Loreto understood.

"Good God!" he cried. "You were a friend of Lilian Hope! You have not been threatened by —"

"Yes," said Sir George, grimly, "I am the next on the list."

He drew a fairly large envelope from his breast pocket and extracted some folded papers. They were dingy and faintly yellow; one edge of the paper was jagged where it had been torn from the book, and Loreto immediately recognized these sheets as pages from Lilian Hope's fatal diary.

"Poor Lilian!" murmured the old man. "She was a wonderful creature, and I loved her once, though she never treated me too well. I had her picture — kept it for years, but my wife grew jealous. To think that she was in such poverty, and that she died in such a frame of mind!"

There was silence in the room for a moment. The old man's cigar had gone out, and he threw it away and fumbled for another. Loreto examined the documents.

"She did once appeal to me for money, Santos," went on the old man. "She never gave me her address, or told me how badly she was situated. She asked me to send her money to the *poste restante* in a big seaside resort. I wrote a letter enclosing money and asking her to let me know if she wanted more. I had no answer. I only learned a year later that my wife had intercepted the letter, and Lilian never received anything."

He sighed faintly and dropped his second cigar into the empty grate.

"Life's a queer thing. Mixture of comic and tragic. Poor Kitty, my wife, was always jealous, and now she'd give a great deal never to have destroyed my letter. I never heard from Lilian again; could never get in touch with her. And now there comes this bolt from the blue — this poor lunatic avenging wrongs that are purely imaginary. One poor mad soul driven on by another who is dead."

Loreto nodded gravely.

"It is horrible and pitiably tragic," he said. "I hope you are taking precautions, Sir George?"

The old man chuckled in grim humor.

"Precautions? What — me? My dear Santos, you don't know me. I'm incapable of such a thing. I'm so absent-minded, I lose glasses, umbrellas,

books — anything I happen to be carrying. I can't even keep a good cigar alight. I get in wrong trains, forget to post letters, and once I delivered the wrong speech to the wrong set of people. I could never think of precautions. Besides, this sort of thing doesn't worry me. I've had a full life, and I've had enough.

"So far from frightening me, Santos, death appears as a rather pleasant thing. It means rest — utter rest. No, I've lived enough. If this madman wants to get me, he'll get me."

"Still — " began Loreto, but he was interrupted.

"He'll get me," repeated Sir George. "He's mad and cunning, and he's not a regular criminal. That's why the police are helpless. You know what police methods are. They can only catch the regulars. Police know all the regulars — got 'em tabbed — know their methods. Crime committed, and the regular must account for himself at the time of the crime. Then their women and pals squeal to the police. But all that sort of thing is no good against a man like this. He's not a regular; he's got no pals. There's no motive and no clue. He's mad, as Jack the Ripper was, and the police never caught Jack."

"But if the police were warned?" suggested Loreto. "If you showed them these diary pages at once — "

The old man shook his head obstinately.

"Don't believe in the police," he barked. "And I don't want them fussing about me. Matter of fact, Santos, I'm telling you all this in confidence. And I have a favor to ask you."

A wistful note crept into his voice.

"I'd like you to take up this case," he said. "I'd like you to try and prevent this poor devil committing more insane crimes. In particular, I would like you to protect my poor wife."

For a moment Loreto wondered whether he had heard aright.

"Your wife?" he echoed. "Do you mean that your wife, too, is threatened?"

Sir George nodded gravely.

"Lilian hated poor Kitty more than anyone else. She has received pages from the diary that make terrible reading. The thing has knocked Kitty out. Her nerves have gone to bits, and she's in a nursing home now, at Cambridge, near Oxsfoot. This murderer has made a definite threat, too. He says he will kill me first, and Kitty will die within a week of my decease. We had

a typewritten note to that effect.

"As I've said, I don't care for myself, but I do for Kitty. I've got nurses watching her day and night, and detectives outside, round the nursing home. But this fellow is so cunning. I don't trust the ordinary policeman, Santos, or ordinary police methods. I wonder if you'd look after Kitty for me?"

There was something in the old man's face and voice — something very simple and pathetic — that touched Loreto, accustomed as he was to this world's sorrows.

"Very well," he said, slowly, "I'll take the thing on, Sir George, and I promise to do my best to stop this madman and put him under restraint. The thing should be comparatively easy now that we are warned in advance."

Sir George rose to his feet and held out his hand to the younger man.

"You're a good fellow, Santos," he observed. "If anyone can catch this murderer, you can, but I don't think it will be easy. In any case, thanks ever so much for taking the job on. Now I must go and say a kind word to Flora Groombridge. She'll scold me for leaving her so long."

Loreto pressed the long, thin hand.

"Take care of yourself," he said, earnestly. "I'll arrange, to-morrow, to have you looked after properly. In the meantime, be careful of strangers, and lock your bedroom door at night."

The old man chuckled.

"I'll ask Flora to mount guard over me," he said. "She'd drive off fifty assassins."

* * *

Back in the drawing-room the house-party was beginning to think of bed. Loreto talked for a time to his sister, and then she bade him good night. Most of the men were taking a final whisky-and-soda before departing, but Adam Steele was playing the fool like a big schoolboy, and trying to perform some trick with a couple of chairs, despite Lady Groombridge's frigid stare. Around him stood some of the younger women, laughing loudly, and Lionel Silk was urging the Australian to further efforts.

Sir George Frame spoke for a time to his hostess, and was introduced to Otisse. The two men began to discuss Brazil, and the Frenchman offered to lend the other a book on that country.

Gradually the big room emptied as one by one the guests went up to bed. Acting upon impulse, Loreto went to Sir George Frame's bedroom. The

baronet had one of the best bedrooms in the house, situated upon the first floor, and he looked rather surprised when he opened the door to Loreto.

"Hullo, Santos!" he exclaimed. "Anything you want, my boy? I was just starting to undress."

"You ought to lock your door," said Loreto, walking into the old man's room. "Have you a valet with you?"

"No. I didn't bring him down. Fact is, Fletcher is a shrewd, discreet fellow, and I sent him along to Cambridge to keep an eye on the detectives who are guarding Kitty. *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*"

The old man chuckled over the tag, but Loreto was making a thorough examination of the big bedroom, and assuring himself that the windows were securely fastened, and that no one was concealed in the room.

"You must be careful, Sir George," he urged. "Remember that your life is threatened, even in this house. This room seems secure enough, but you must lock your door and bolt it."

He added the last words as he turned towards the door and saw that there were inside bolts at the top and bottom.

"All right, my boy," said the old man, good-humoredly. "I like to read for an hour before sleeping, and Otisse is to bring me along a book of his on Brazil. Directly he's gone, I'll lock, bolt, and bar. Good-night, my boy. Thanks so much."

With this assurance Loreto had to be content. He went upstairs to his own room, but it was a long time before he could sleep.

* * *

It was very improbable that Sir George would be in danger for this one night, and to-morrow Loreto would see that the absent-minded old man was properly guarded. Yet for an hour Loreto tossed sleeplessly upon his bed, thinking of anyone who could threaten or harm Sir George Frame. The French explorer was taking a book to the baronet's room, but Otisse was all right, and had been in Brazil when the "Death Diary Murders" were committed.

Sir George's windows were secure; there was no way of entry except by the door, or smashing a window, which would raise an alarm.

And upon this thought Loreto fell at last into a troubled sleep, and awoke with the autumn sun streaming across his face.

It was after nine o'clock, and consequently rather late when Loreto de-

scended to the breakfast-room. Most of the house-party had gone to tennis or the links, but Lady Groombridge herself was breakfasting, and with her were Otisse, Adam Steele, and Lionel Silk. There were also four women, among whom was Cleta, who waxed ironical about her brother's tardiness.

"Let him be, my dear," said Lady Groombridge, tolerantly. "He's not the last."

"I slept rather badly," explained Loreto.

"I always do," drawled Lionel Silk. "The night is such a wonderful time to dream, but one should never sleep whilst one dreams. How we waste those wonderful hours of silence and moonlight in vulgar sleep!"

Adam Steele laughed loudly.

"Silk wants a 'Moonlight Saving Bill'," he suggested.

"The lovers would applaud that," said Otisse. "Really we should ask Sir George Frame to propose the Bill in Parliament."

"By the way," said Lady Groombridge, sharply, "Sir George is very late, and he's usually an early riser."

A parlormaid was in the room at the moment, and the girl put in a word.

"I have just knocked at Sir George's door, m'lady," she said. "I knocked hard, but I could get no answer. I noticed that his shaving water hadn't been taken in and it was cold."

Lady Groombridge glared at the girl and then at her guests.

"That's strange," she said. "You knocked hard?"

"Did you try the door?" asked Otisse, quickly.

"No, sir," said the maid. "I just knocked."

"I don't like this," said Lady Groombridge, and a note of anxiety crept into her voice as she looked about her.

A swift feeling of apprehension swept suddenly over everyone. A woman put the general thought into words.

"Sir George was a friend of Lilian Hope. Suppose —"

The men were on their feet now, and Steele's chair overturned with a crash.

"I'll have a look," he cried, and, in his quick, impetuous fashion, he was out of the room and dashing up the broad staircase before the others. Loreto and Otisse were a yard behind the Australian; Silk, Lady Groombridge, and the other women brought up the rear.

In five seconds Steel was at the baronet's bedroom door, and was rattling

the handle and calling loudly.

"Sir George!" he shouted. "Sir George!"

But there was no answer, and the Australian threw himself against the door.

"It's locked," he panted. "I can't move it."

"Knock a panel in," said Otisse, quietly. "Here, use this."

Accustomed to alarms, the little French explorer had all his wits about him. Now he snatched from the wall a Crusader's mace, which, with other weapons and armor, decorated the passage.

"That's right," boomed Lady Groombridge, "beat in the panels, Mr. Steele. Don't hesitate."

Thus encouraged, Adam Steele acted swiftly. Calling for elbow space, he swung his heavy weapon, and in three blows had one of the door panels in splinters. Through the jagged hole his arm went to the shoulder, and there was the click of a turning key.

"There's a bolt at the top and bottom, Mr. Steele," called Lady Groombridge. "Can you reach them?"

"I think so," said Steele, straining, and red in the face.

Loreto felt a hand clutch his arm, and looked round at the pale face of Cleta.

"What do you think has happened, Loreto?" asked the girl, but before he could answer there was a metallic snapping of bolts, and the door was pushed open.

"*Mon Dieu!*" said Otisse, softly, and a woman suddenly screamed, for now the horrified party could see directly into the room.

And there, in the middle of the apartment, some way from his bed, lay Sir George Frame. He lay flat upon his face, one arm doubled under him, the other outstretched. One thin white hand showed upon the dark blue carpet, the fingers spread, and flattened out like a starfish.

Otisse was first beside the body, and made a quick examination.

"I'm afraid he's dead," said the explorer. "Stabbed with a knife in the back. Keep the women away."

The women, in fact, after one terrified look, withdrew slowly and returned downstairs to await further news. Lady Groombridge alone remained in the room, and she was looking about her in bewilderment.

"How was this dreadful thing done?" she asked. "The windows are bolted on the inside, the chimney is impassable. Who can have done it?"

"The 'Diary Murderer,'" said Santos, and pointed to a crumpled scrap of paper with one jagged edge that lay beside the body. Stooping, he picked up the diary page covered with its scrawling handwriting, and exclaimed aloud. On the paper was printed a date, the seventeenth of September.

"To-day's date!" he cried. "This murderer certainly has method."

"But who can have done it, and where is he?" wailed Lady Groombridge. "This room is practically sealed at all points."

"That's true," cried Steele. "By Jove! The man may be hidden here now!"

He, Otisse, Silk, and the lady began to search the apartment, looking in cupboards, behind curtains, under the bed, and in the bed itself. They began with likely hiding-places, and ended by searching fantastically.

Otisse clicked his tongue in the impatient manner of a clever man who is baffled.

"But this is extraordinary," he exclaimed. "It was humanly impossible to enter this room unless there is a secret passage."

He turned questioningly to Lady Groombridge, but she shook her head.

"This is a modern house, built by my late husband," she said. "I know the place thoroughly, and I can assure you there is no secret passage, and the walls are not thick enough for such trickiness."

"But how on earth was the murder committed, then?" said Steele. "There is no sign of a weapon, and this poor old man has been stabbed with a knife."

Lionel Silk, meanwhile, was walking about the room, tapping the walls, while Lady Groombridge glared at him.

"I tell you, Mr. Silk, there is nothing of that sort here," she said. "If you wish, I can show you the architect's plan of the house."

Loreto, meanwhile, stared down at the dead man with thoughtful eyes. The body was clad in pajamas and a dressing-gown, which was open as though the garment had been put on hurriedly. A small electric reading lamp still burned beside the bed upon an occasional table, and on the bed itself was a book on Brazil by Henri Otisse. A pair of gold-rimmed spectacles were folded in the book.

Otisse came to Loreto's side, and the Frenchman's face was pale beneath its tan.

"This is awful, Santos," he whispered. "How was the thing done?"

"He was reading your book," Loreto pointed out. "Did you take it to him last night?"

"No. I met one of the maids going to bed, and I sent the book by her." The Frenchman laughed a trifle uneasily. "You don't suspect me of murder, Santos?"

"No," said Loreto, quietly. "I only want to establish some definite facts. When, for example, was Frame last seen alive? Later I will interview that maid you sent with the book. I suppose you can remember her?"

"Certainly," said Otisse. "I'll get her now, if you like."

"No, later will do," replied Santos, and raised his voice. "Lady Groombridge," he said, "I think we had better telephone the police at once. We are not likely to discover anything by looking about in this room. It is police work, anyway. Meanwhile, leave everything exactly as it is."

"Very well, Mr. Santos," said the lady, with surprising meekness. "This is a terribly mysterious thing! Why, a mouse couldn't get into this room, let alone a man with a knife."

"Perhaps it was the ghost of Lilian Hope," said Silk, in a deep, melancholy tone. "Perhaps she still walks the earth, and avenges herself upon those who betrayed her."

"With a knife in one hand and a diary in the other," sneered Otisse. "It took more than a ghost to kill this poor man."

* * *

They all left the room, and Loreto shut the broken door behind him. The local police were telephoned for, and had not been in the house long before Inspector Comfort, of the Criminal Investigation Department, arrived in a car from headquarters.

The Inspector was in charge of the "Death Diary" cases, a fact that had already added one or two grey hairs to his large round head.

He greeted Loreto as an old friend, and then began to carry out the usual police examination.

Later, as he paced a deserted croquet lawn in Lady Groombridge's grounds, Loreto saw his sister coming towards him.

"Isn't this awful?" asked Cleta. "That dear old man! And how was it done? The door was locked and bolted, the windows were latched, and yet Sir George was stabbed to death. Inspector Comfort can make nothing of it."

Loreto nodded. His eyes were fixed upon a far-off pear tree, and there was an expression in them of thought and concentration that Cleta had seen before. It was a curious, detached gaze, and she had seen it in Loreto's eyes

when he was playing chess, or studying a problem.

"It is a curious business altogether," he said, slowly, and then his tone changed. "Cleta, I am going to run up to London for a week," he said, more briskly. "You will be all right down here, won't you? I'm going now to make excuses to Lady Groombridge."

The girl looked at him in surprise, but she was accustomed to these sudden decisions of his.

"I'll be all right," she replied. "Have you got some clue as to who did this, Loreto?"

"*Quien sabe*," he answered, provokingly, and was halfway across the lawn before she could put a further question.

So for several days Loreto disappeared, and Cleta could only suppose that he was upon his mysterious business in London.

* * *

Inspector Comfort was completely baffled by the murder and by the evidence that confronted him. Apparently the door of the room had been locked and doubly bolted: the windows were latched securely upon the inside, and the chimney was impassable. There were no secret passages or sliding panels; and certainly no one had been concealed in the murdered man's room.

Comfort found the maid who had taken Otisse's book to Sir George Frame. This girl, scarcely seventeen years of age, was apparently the last, except the murderer, to see the baronet alive. She stated that she had taken the book along as directed. She had knocked at the door, and Sir George, in his shirt-sleeves, had opened it. He had thanked her for the book, and as she went away she heard the old man lock his bedroom door.

And yet, in the small hours of the night, someone had entered this locked and barred room and stabbed Sir George Frame to death.

The "Death Diary Murderer" had been avenged, and of his three murders this was the most mysterious. According to the doctor's evidence, Frame had been killed some hours before the discovery of his body by Lady Groombridge's guests.

The whole thing puzzled the unfortunate Comfort more than any crime in his experience. He studied the fatal page of the diary, which contained Lilian Hope's usual denunciations, but told the Inspector nothing. There was the tragic parallel of the dates, but that conveyed little except to shed

a light upon the workings of an unbalanced mind.

Nearly a week had passed, when the despairing police-inspector heard his telephone bell ring, and lifted the receiver to listen to Loreto's cheerful voice.

"That you, Comfort?" asked Loreto.

"Yes. Is that Santos?"

"His very self! I say, I think I can introduce you to the 'Death Diary Murderer'. Yes. Meet me at a quarter to eleven to-morrow morning at Oxsfoot Station. Don't be a minute late, and bring a couple of men with you. I think our friend will want a little holding."

There was a click as the wire was closed, and Inspector Comfort jumped to his feet and began to walk excitedly about his office.

Santos was an aggravating devil! He wouldn't answer questions, and he would indulge in dramatic *dénouements*, but Comfort knew that he could rely upon his eccentric friend's promise.

* * *

The following morning, at twenty minutes to eleven, Inspector Comfort and two plain-clothes detectives arrived at Oxsfoot Railway Station. At precisely a quarter to eleven, Loreto's big Rolls glided up to the station entrance, and Loreto himself leaned forward from the driver's seat.

"Put your men in the back, Comfort," he said, "and then come and sit beside me."

A moment later, as Loreto was backing and turning his car, a laborer, on an old-fashioned bicycle, rode beside Loreto and spoke to him.

"He's on the Cranbridge road, walking towards the Home," said the "laborer," and his voice was that of an educated man. "You've plenty of time. You can catch him up in five minutes."

Loreto nodded his thanks and comprehension, and the big car glided forward along a narrow winding country lane.

"So it's a man?" said Comfort, and Loreto nodded.

"A poor unbalanced devil, Comfort," he said. "Mad, but cunning, and dangerous as a poisonous snake. The trouble is that you could meet him fifty times, and never suspect him of being mad at all. Of course, his mother was only mad on one point — the mania that she was being persecuted by her former friends."

"His mother!" exclaimed Comfort, looking at his friend's grim face.

Loreto swung his car round a sharp corner and slowed down considerably.

"Yes, his mother," he said, quietly. "The man you want is the son of Lilian Hope. An illegitimate son, hidden away from her closest friends. The boy was brought up at a country farm, where his mother secretly visited him during many years. Later he went abroad to the Colonies with money furnished by Lilian Hope. He lost sight of her, and for years thought her dead. Then, when he was a man of thirty, he met in London an old landlady who had known Lilian Hope in her declining years. In this way the grown son became possessed of his mother's few poor possessions, and among them was the diary."

Loreto's voice grew stern, though there was a touch of sadness in his voice as he continued:

"The man had always been excitable and unbalanced. He had experienced a hard life, and his early love was for his mother. You can imagine such a man reading that terrible diary, poring over every hysterical page, noting each wild denunciation. The thing drove him mad. He kept a diary, too. He wrote pages to his dead mother, and promised her, in writing, that she should be revenged."

"And he kept his word," said Inspector Comfort, softly. "Who is the man?"

The lane suddenly straightened out and the hedges disappeared. At each side there now appeared a common, covered with gorse and bramble, and short grass that ran to the edge of the straight road. In the distance a pleasant red-brick house raised its chimney-pots towards the sky, and towards this house a solitary black-clad figure was walking along the road.

"There," said Santos, with a forward jerk of his head. "That man on the road is the murderer, and the son of Lilian Hope."

An exclamation left Comfort's lips, and he knocked on the glass behind him to arouse the attention of his men. Rigid, and with tense face, the Inspector leaned forward, watching the black speck that grew constantly larger as the big car ran forward.

Now the pedestrian could be seen plainly, a vigorous, thick-set figure dressed in conventional black garb.

"Great snakes! It's a clergyman!" gasped Comfort, and Loreto smiled grimly.

"Only for this occasion," he said. "Our friend is visiting the nursing home where Lady Frame lies ill. In the next room to her the local parson is

undergoing treatment. I think I see how our friend planned to get at his next victim."

As he spoke the car crept alongside the pedestrian, and Loreto raised his voice.

"Good morning, Steele," he cried, and the "clergyman" turned, to reveal the startled face of the "Australian Caruso," Adam Steele.

After that things happened with extraordinary swiftness. Steele jumped back, away from the car, and his hand went to his pocket. An automatic was in his fingers when Comfort sprang from his seat and knocked the madman's weapon into the grass. The two detectives leaped to the assistance of their chief, but even then a desperate struggle ensued before the three officers could overcome and handcuff their prisoner.

There was no doubt now about Adam Steele's madness, and his twitching face and convulsive limbs were in Loreto's mind for many a day after. Finally, however, he was securely handcuffed, and placed between the two detectives in the back of the car. Loreto backed the Rolls on to the common, and soon she was heading towards London at forty miles an hour.

* * *

That night Inspector Comfort sat in Loreto's house in Regent's Park while the Spaniard explained the whole thing to his friend.

"Steele gave himself away by being too clever," said Santos. "He was cunning, and a brilliant opportunist, but he relied too much on his power to outwit others. He threatened to kill Lady Frame within a week of her husband, and it was easy, once I suspected him, to make quite sure of my suspicions. I preferred to take him whilst on the way to his fresh victim because, as you found, Steele had a fresh page of his mother's diary upon him. If he had succeeded in killing Lady Frame, that page of the diary would have been found beside the unfortunate woman's body. Steele would have got into the nursing home under pretext of visiting the clergyman who was in the next room to Lady Frame. Once he had got into the place, Steele relied on his wits to find a way of accomplishing his purpose."

Comfort nodded.

"There was poison on him, as well as a knife. He would probably have got the old lady all right. Of course, the poor devil is quite mad, though no one seems to have noticed it. He will certainly never be hanged."

"I suspected that the man was unbalanced when I first met him," Loreto

said. "Though, of course, I was far from thinking him mad. There are so many excitable, nervy people about in these days, and one can't imagine they're all homicidal lunatics. Steele was noisy and boisterous; he indulged in a fair amount of horseplay at Lady Groombridge's, but no one thought much of it. After the murder, when I came to suspect Steele, I saw the significance of all his excitability. I went to London and burgled his house at Hampstead the same night. When I found the diary — it was stuffed at the back of his bookcase, and bound in a cover of *The Three Musketeers* — I was really not very surprised at all I read."

"How did you come to suspect Steele?" asked Inspector Comfort, and Loreto smiled.

"You know, Comfort," he said, "the easiest of all mysteries to solve are those that are considered inexplicable. I don't want to manufacture a cheap paradox, but it is a fact that if there seems no possible way in which a thing can be done, then at least there are very few ways in which it could be done, which makes a solution all the easier."

"Or all the more difficult," growled Comfort. "How did Steele get into a room when the door was locked and bolted and the windows were —"

"He didn't," said Loreto. "He went to the door and knocked on it. When poor old careless Frame opened, Steel went in on some pretext and stabbed his victim in the back."

"But the door was found locked and bolted!"

"By Steele himself," said Loreto. "It was clever. The man was a brilliant opportunist, as I have said. He was first up the stairs, and first at the door. He called out to his dead victim; he rattled the door handle; he held the handle while he flung himself against the door. It was all easy, but very effective. Finally he knocked a hole in the panel and fooled with the key and bolts. I thought somehow the snap of the bolts didn't sound quite right, but we were all excited, and Cleta was talking to me."

"Snakes alive!" exclaimed Comfort. "He was clever. No wonder I was taken in by the evidence."

"He was too clever," observed Santos. "He made things too inexplicable. I think it was Whitman who advised the young to learn all they could, but 'to reject anything that insulted their intelligence'. That locked door insulted my intelligence. I had to reject that as an acceptable fact. The windows were really barred; there was really no one concealed in the room; there were actually no sliding panels. All these things I could prove for myself,

but the one thing I had to take on trust was that locked and bolted door. I had to accept Steele's word for an impossibility. I rejected Steele's word, and began to suspect him. He was too clever, and, thank God, there will be no more 'Death Diary Murders'."

"It was a good piece of deduction," said the Inspector, judicially. "A very pretty piece of deduction."

Loreto shook his head moodily.

"I wish I had been in time to save that poor old man," he said.

A MINUTE MYSTERY

The Case of the Severed Ear *by Roy Post and Austin Ripley*

Colonel "Velvet" Jim Donovan, Chief of Near East American Intelligence, sat in his Cairo office comparing Arabic and Hindustani dictionaries. His eyes veiled as he found the two words he sought.

A soft knock on the door and his chief interpreter, Sidi Maffendi, entered.

"Have you reached a decision concerning that gruesome package you received this morning, Colonel?" the Arab asked.

"Not the details, but I am determined that the Fascist canaille shall pay dearly."

An hour before as Donovan sat alone in his office a package had been delivered by registered post. It contained a freshly amputated human ear. To it was sewed with scarlet thread the following:

> This *was* your Lt. Dodson's. Until you release our comrade, Vittoria Campella, we shall send you each day a piece of Dodson's body — living body — until he dies!
>
> Rienzi

Keeping his own counsel the Colonel had placed the package in a drawer and pondered means of solving the distressing problem. While so doing a phrase in Hindustani he had heard repeated under odd circumstances reoccurred to him.

Sidi Maffendi was talking:

"A formidable problem, is it not, Colonel? The Fascists take the low advantage. They *know* you would not resort to such fiendish mutilation so they . . ."

"Velvet" Jim closed the dictionaries, said:

"You think that is their psychology, Maffendi?"

"Yes. They are inhuman dogs, those Fascisti."

Donovan's eyes were soft.

"You are fluent in Hindustani, Maffendi?"

"But yes, as you well know. I do not understand . . ."

"But this you understand." Donovan's voice was almost a whisper. "Treachery and treason receive the same punishment in all tongues — death. Yours will be swift, Maffendi."

What caused "Velvet" Jim Donovan to take this action?

Solution

As Donovan kept his own counsel, no one but those involved could have known that he received a package and could not possibly have known the nature of its contents. When Sidi Maffendi betrayed his guilty knowledge of "the gruesome package" Donovan knew he was in the pay of the enemy.

One of Miss Shore's specialties in fiction is husbands-and-wives-and-their-families. Here is Miss Shore's specialty in prime form, pleasantly mixed up in a jewel-theft. And when we tell you that the "detective" in the story is a dentist (how many dentist detectives do you know?), you can only drop whatever you are doing and find out why "Opals Are Bad Luck" for some people, but good luck for others. An original story, never before published.

OPALS ARE BAD LUCK

by VIOLA BROTHERS SHORE

I DON'T know what made me dig up that old yarn about the opal pendant the night my wife invited Zoe Cameron and her dentist friend to dinner and the opera. Skeletons belong in six feet of ground with a marble slab over them. But from the moment that dentist fellow stepped into our foyer he got my goat. Not because he didn't wear soup-and-fish. Hell, the night I married Alice was the first time I ever had one on my back. But when I was a young punk, working my way up in Hodgett's Bank, I used to look at people who had money and made up my mind that Joel Quinn would have it too. But this fellow seemed to be having some private joke on me and my penthouse and the special glass dome on my foyer which gives it the look of perpetual sunlight.

For instance, while Abraham Lincoln, our butler, was taking their wraps, Zoe introduced him to the dentist and I mentioned that Abraham had been with my wife's family over thirty years, and so we didn't treat him like a servant. "I happen to be very democratic," I explained.

"I can see that," this Dr. Marcus said, and held out his hand to Abraham. "How do you do, Mr. Lincoln," he said.

Abraham took the hand. "Nobody nevuh call me Mr. Lincoln, 'cept my own people," he grinned. "You-all go 'head and call me Abraham, suh."

"Thank you sir," replied Marcus, "I'd like to. Everybody calls me Doc."

I decided he'd never get a dollar of mine for his clinic, no matter how many rickety kids he took care of. My wife had been to the clinic with Zoe and she came home saying the guy had the greatest heart she had ever met and the clearest thinking mind. Well, I wanted to get a look at this Master Brain. And when I did, I wondered what a smart, two-fisted newspaper woman like Zoe Cameron could see in a thin, frayed young dentist with cigarette fingers.

Zoe was looking very smooth in something brown. She always reminds me of a high-priced radio — newest model, dark wood, satin finish, going 24 hours a day. But you like to have her around. She was full of some mystery yarn she was writing and it seems this Master Brain had helped her figure it out. "He helped me analyze the *underlying situation* —" she corrected me. "Actually there are no mysteries — only things we don't understand — and puzzles."

"Oh, but the Who-Done-It —" my wife protested, leading the way into the dining room, "Don't you call that a mystery?" She was wearing something honeycolored like her hair and looking her loveliest which, from where I sit, is pretty damn lovely. Alice never draws attention to her hair or her lips or her figure. Only whenever you hear the words supple or mellow or gracious, you think of Alice.

"No," Zoe said, "he calls it a confusion — like the present world situation, to which we must apply the searchlight of reason, lit with the electric bulb of science." She was ribbing him, of course, but you could see she was impressed. He did have a good forehead, and I know women go for those deep, smudgy eyes, but personally give me the cleancut American type. "We must go after the underlying roots, ignoring the intertwined surface vines. Right, Doc?"

He had a sort of quick, private smile that gave you a flash of the way he must have looked in high school. "Did I really sound so pompous? All I meant was that those surface vines *seem* to hold the problem, whereas actually they only obscure it." For all the attention he was paying to his clear turtle soup, it might have been the essence of surface vines.

"It came to me like a flash," Zoe gushed, "that I was trying to assemble a lot of clues in my yarn, instead of digging into the root situation. Once I saw that, it's kindergarten play to trail some tangled vines across it."

Alice was thrilled and they talked about root-causes and vine-surfaces of practically everything from swing to the profit motive underlying our whole civilization. When Abraham had served the salad, I decided it was time for all good business men to come to the aid of the party. "I'd like to tell you a little situation that happened to us about six years ago. I'm sure we'd appreciate a great analytical searchlight, lit with the electric bulb of science." I knew my wife was looking at me pleadingly, but I wanted to see this Master Mind either come through or get off the throne. "You don't mind, Alice —?"

"You mean you've got a *mystery* —?" Zoe's hungry brown eyes fairly snapped at it.

"Well, maybe it's only a puzzle —"

"I don't think I'd tell it, Joel —" Alice suggested gently.

"Oh come on —" pleaded Zoe. "Although if there's a skeleton in any of the Quinn closets, I'll never believe in cedar linings again!"

"It wasn't a Quinn closet. It happened while we were still living with Alice's mother in the Barroway mausoleum, in Baltimore."

Zoe's fork remained in midair. "Alice! You're not one of the Baltimore Barroways! You never mentioned it!"

"We're not very proud of the connection," I said and reached over for my wife's hand.

"If it's going to embarrass Mrs. Quinn —" suggested the dentist and that settled it. I don't need anybody to tell me how to handle my own wife. So I told the story.

It happened on our first wedding anniversary. I wanted to bring Alice a gift, but the Barroways had convinced me I wasn't long on taste, so I went into the best glass front on Fifth Avenue and described Alice to the best jewel expert in New York. He finally boiled down his stock to three items — a ruby ring, a diamond bracelet and a carved opal set in sapphires and diamonds, with a chain of matched sapphires. I thought Alice might go for the ruby, and I liked the bracelet because you could see your Fifty Thousand Dollars in it, but the jeweler held out for the pendant. It was exquisite, Monsieur Quinn, it was a rarity — a museum piece — mon dieu, it had belonged to Marie Antoinette! All I knew was that it cost more than the others. I finally decided to bring home all three and let Alice choose.

I didn't mention them until the family were all together. Because I knew Alice wouldn't make a decision without consulting them, and I wanted to be around when she did, to make sure she got what she wanted, and not what her family might talk her into wanting because it had the biggest resale value. As it happened, Alice didn't care for diamonds, and felt superstitious about opals, especially in view of what happened to Marie Antoinette.

["Well, it *was* bad luck," my wife interrupted. "Even if Marie Antoinette never saw it, it was certainly bad luck for — well, for all of us." "Except," I pointed out, "that the same thing would have happened with an emerald or anything else."]

I waited until we had finished dinner and then, although there were only six of us, we had to have our coffee in the drawing room, which had just been done over in real Gobelin at a price that would have furnished dental clinics for all the rickety kids in New York. Alice's mother enthroned herself beside the fireplace in the only armchair I liked; because it squeaked every time the old lady leaned her weight on it, which was more than any of the family had nerve enough to do. Without speaking ill of the dead, every marcel wave on my departed mother-in-law's head looked as if she had just said to it, You lie down there and don't you dare to move! And she certainly rode herd on the lot of them.

"If you must have jewelry," she said and the cords of her neck strained against the black velvet band she wore to hold them together, "the Barroway pearls can still be redeemed!" I had refused to get them out of pawn because I knew that whenever Alice's brother put his feet in some more flypaper, the pearls would go right back to their uncle.

Alice's younger sister held the pendant up against the firelight and sighed, "It's awfully pretty, isn't it — in a sort of haunted way — ?" But nobody paid any attention to Willette. Nobody ever did. She had a sort of haunted, white-rabbity prettiness herself, only she was so thin that her gold bracelets kept slipping over her wrist and the little jangle they made was your only way of knowing she was around. She sighed again and passed the pendant across Alice to Uncle Digby, sitting in the other corner of the davenport, although sitting is an overstatement.

He was a fat, overstuffed old man, so lazy that he hated to move, except from his room at the club, down to the roulette table, where he was too lazy to care whether he won or lost. He usually lost, and for the rest of the month he waddled around the family circle trying to raise a ten or a twenty if it wasn't too much trouble. Good food always put him to sleep and his bare upper lids were already flirting with the pouches under his eyes. He didn't even seem to see the pendant Willette held out to him.

So Alice took it and passed it to her brother, who suggested sweetly, "Why not give her all three?" He had all the charm of a spoiled chow dog, even to a sunburst of coppery hair over mean eyes and a stubborn mouth. "Wouldn't you find it more gratifying if people knew that Joel Quinn could afford *three* pieces of jewelry at one time?" I never pay any attention to chow dogs, but both his sisters used to shrivel whenever he fastened his restless attention on them. He'd have taken the bread out of their mouths

if they were starving. Or rather, he'd have stood by while the old lady took it and gave it to him. Because, of course, he was the only boy — the one and only Teddy Barroway.

["Teddy Barroway!" Zoe broke in explosively. "Not the one that Bingham Bailey —" she stopped and looked at Alice uncomfortably. "It's no secret," I reassured her, "the one who was shot by his best friend because he finally got himself in a trap he couldn't crawl out of."]

Anyway, there we were when Abraham brought in the brandy — the old lady in the Gobelin armchair that squeaked, and across the coffee table, Willette and Alice on the davenport that seemed to rise and fall with the increasing weight of Uncle Digby's breathing. Teddy was flinging himself around the room and I was leaning against the mantel watching them, and figuring that the gentleman from Mars would have picked us for one big, happy family. Whereas actually Alice and I should have been off in a place of our own. Willette was eating herself up over some out-at-elbows school teacher and Teddy was already in his jam with the Baileys and he was determined to get money out of the family, or he wouldn't have been there at all. I often wondered how they would have managed to keep saving the Good Old Family Name if I hadn't come along. . . .

As I recall, Willette was the only one who spoke up for the pendant, although I was beginning to get a kick out of picturing $60,000 worth of Marie Antoinette's jewelry around the neck of Joel Quinn's wife. Besides, I was sure I could have gotten it for Forty . . . Teddy insisted on all-three-or-nothing. Digby was wheezing rhythmically and the old lady stuck to the Barroway pearls. On the whole I was satisfied when Alice chose the ruby, because I was sure it was the one she wanted. And it looked beautiful on her finger when she held it up against the firelight.

I put the diamond bracelet back in the velvet case and opened the hand-tooled box that had a special well for the chain and pendant. But when I looked around for the pendant it was gone.

Everybody had handled it, except Uncle Digby, but nobody remembered who had handled it last. In fact, Alice insisted she had passed it to me, but that was probably because of the expression that had begun to show on my face. I stood at the mantel not saying anything, just looking from one to the other.

Of course when it wasn't anywhere in plain sight, everybody thought it must have dropped behind the cushions of the couch. So Alice and Willette

jumped up and Mrs. Barroway rang for Abraham — and they finally pried Uncle Digby out of the corner although he hated to get up. But the pendant wasn't there. We all looked. And then Abraham looked. And he looked under the old lady too, and under the rugs and in the coffee cups.

Well, a $60,000 pendant can't just disappear. At least I made up my mind it couldn't. It was in that room. None of us had gone out. And none of us *were* going out until that pendant turned up. The old lady kept saying, "It *can't* be gone —" as though I had invented the whole thing. I guess it was like Dr. Marcus' vine theory. I'd start defending myself and we'd get in an argument and lose sight of the one important fact — that the pendant was not there.

The tip of Willette's nose always twitched when she was scared. Uncle Digby was turning over the same three coffee cups, as though he felt it would look funny not to be doing *some*thing. And Alice kept repeating in a worried little voice, "It'll turn up —"

"Be too bad, wouldn't it," sneered Teddy who was lounging against the window with his hands in his pockets, "if poor old Joel had to pay for it without having anything to show for his money?"

"You're damn right!" I said and closing the door on Abraham, I turned the key. Then I went over and locked the second door and put the key in my pocket. They were all watching me — resentful, afraid, curious or contemptuous — but I took my time coming back to the mantel. Alice had a hunch of what I was going to do, but I avoided her eyes and stood facing the others, measuring them. Uncle Digby looked a little less sleepy than usual, Willette a little more scared. The old lady, exactly as usual, was ready with her gloves up. Teddy, I noticed, was not looking bored. He seemed to be waiting with a sort of mocking interest for what his brother-in-law, that dull, lowbred real estate fellow was going to do.

I lit a cigarette and then I let them have it, weighing each word. "That pendant is in this room. And I want it back."

Nobody said anything. I didn't expect them to. I didn't expect anybody to hold it up and get his hand slapped. So I went on — "It is ten minutes to nine — and before the clock strikes, that pendant is going to be back on that coffee table. If it isn't, I'm phoning for the police."

The old lady blazed first — she always did. "You'll do no such thing, Joel Quinn! We'll have no police and no newspapermen in this house!" She was furious at my mentioning police on the sacred Barroway preserves

— not at the fact that there was a thief in the sacred Barroway family!

["Why do you say that?" For the first time the dentist broke in. "If you'll hold on a while," I informed him, "you'll see why —" and I went on with the story.]

Even Alice was against me. She took off the ruby and handed it to me without a word. But I knew what she meant — 'Consider that you gave me the pendant, and stop making all this fuss.' Alice took a different view later, when she began to see the truth about her family. But at the time she was ashamed of me — ashamed that I could behave without taste — and not that they could behave without morals. "Please, Joel," she said, "I'm sure the pendant will turn up somewhere." They were all sure it would, but I stood my ground. And by that time there were just about five minutes left to the hour. I turned off the main lights.

"There are just five minutes left," I said. "At two minutes of nine I snap off this lamp and whoever has that pendant will have time and darkness to put it back on the coffee table. I'm not interested in knowing who took it, but I advise whoever did, to put it back. Because at the first stroke of the clock I turn on the light and if it isn't there, I call the police.

"Another thing —" I held up my hand to cut off discussion. "Instead of spending money to keep the Barroway name looking clean, I'll spend more than the pendant is worth to publicize this thing, so that it won't be possible to unload that opal. It will be hot in every city on both sides of the Atlantic. And I'll spend another Sixty Thousand to put whoever took it behind bars.

"And let me tell you one thing more — in case you think I won't go through with it — that Alice will be able to twist me around her finger. I know exactly how much you all hate me. Mrs. Barroway can never forgive me for being the son of a common cop. Teddy hates me because I've just refused to part with enough money to keep him out of the country, in the style to which he's accustomed, for as long as it will take his current mess to cool off. Digby knows that I paid back $400 to Abraham and threatened to fire him if he ever lent Mr. Digby another nickel. Even Willette blames me because her mother is trying to marry her off to Hodgett's Forty Millions, and I happened to be the one who introduced my old boss.

"So it gives me great pleasure to let you know that I think you're a lot of leeches and cowards and bullies and it will give me even greater pleasure to turn any one of you over to the police. I'm sorry for Alice, but she's got

to wake up and realize that a name is only as good as the people that carry it — and the people are only as good as their principles. Since she took the name of Quinn, that's her responsibility, and the hell with Barroway if its owners can't keep it shipshape.

"So now you know. You haven't a chance to get away with it. And you've got just 120 seconds to put it back —" And I switched out the light.

It was so still in the room that every tick of the big French clock took a nick out of stretched nerves. I began to count along with the clock.

While I told off the first thirty seconds there was literally not another sound in the room. But as I kept on I could begin to hear things — the wheezy breathing of Uncle Digby who always got more asthmatic under pressure — and someone walking around on the rug — I imagined it was Teddy since I hadn't heard anyone else get up.

Before I got to eighty, the Gobelin chair squeaked twice. And right after that there was a little jingle of metal. Somebody gasped but I recognized the tinkle of one thin bracelet against another. About three counts later somebody swallowed audibly — as though a gulp of air had come up against a rigid windpipe.

It was exactly when I said One Hundred that the sound came — the one we were waiting for. It was no more than a tiny muffled clink of metal on china. But after that the silence in the room was so tense you could feel it throb. I kept on counting until the clock gave the warning gasp it always sends out before it strikes. From somewhere in the darkness it called forth an echo. And as the first stroke of nine screamed through the silence, I switched on the light.

Before I bent toward the coffee table, I knew what I would see. Alice's eyes, wide and fixed on her empty cup, forewarned me. There in the saucer lay the opal pendant. . . .

"And there," I said to my dinner guests, "you have the story."

"Is *that all* —?" Zoe turned her disappointed face to the dentist.

He laughed. "You insist on having somebody killed? It seems to me Mr. Quinn has told us a fine yarn and told it very well. You must admit he's given us a very complex situation."

"Well, of course, there's that —" admitted Zoe reluctantly. "You never found out who took it?" Alice shook her head. "Well, I suppose it would be fun to try and figure it out. Unless —?" Again she looked at Alice.

"I'd like to know," Alice said slowly, and repeated, "I'd like to know. It made me quite miserable for a long time. Especially because of Willette. She was so unhappy anyway — and just about that time the boy was dismissed from his teaching job — it was a civil rights case and the papers were full of it. Poor Willette had nobody to turn to. Nobody. Not even me. It was all bottled up in her and one day it just exploded and she went off and married him. Without a cent. Without even taking her clothes. And to this day there's a wall between us — because she always thought I thought she took the pendant. But of course I didn't. . . ."

"Who, did you think, took it?" inquired the dentist, but she shrugged, avoiding his eyes. "I don't know —"

"Well, if you want to know what *I* think —" began Zoe.

"I'd like to hear what Doc thinks," I said. "I'd like to see how this analysis is done. How we get the vines out of the way and dig down to the roots."

"Not knowing the people —" the dentist had his alibi ready — "or all their circumstances, it's hard to judge what is irrelevant."

"Well, let's take them." Zoe was a pretty practical young woman. "Willette you think is out? But Mr. Quinn said nobody ever paid any attention to Willette — wouldn't that give her the best opportunity? And she looked more scared than usual. If her mother was putting on pressure about Hodgett's Forty Millions, maybe she saw the pendant as the way out —?"

The dentist thought that reasoning was pretty superficial. "I believe you said, Mr. Quinn, you were leaning against the mantel, watching them all? It must have taken steady nerves to try anything under your shrewd and observing eyes. And if Willette was so timid she was afraid to speak up for the man she loved —"

"One minute —" I interrupted. "I'm not accusing Willette, but just for the record — for the 'scientific analysis' — any psychologist will tell you that very timid people, if they're driven too far, will turn into lions —"

"And she was attracted to the pendant —" Zoe had a real sleuth-story nose. "And Mr. Quinn heard her bracelets jangling in the dark —"

The doctor shook his head. "Willette was in love with a poor school teacher and only dread of her family kept her from marrying him. When she did finally run off, she didn't even take the clothes that belonged to her. So I don't think money meant a great deal to her. The pendant wouldn't have solved her problem anyway. Even if she knew how to cash it in, that

wouldn't have removed the family pressure, when the other man had Forty Millions. I don't believe those were the circumstances under which the haunted little white rabbit would have turned into the lion. However, don't let's argue about psychological shadings —"

"I don't see how we can get rid of irrelevancies —" Zoe insisted, "any better than by eliminating them. What about Mrs. Barroway. She needed money, didn't she?"

"Always." Alice smiled. "I never knew my mother when she didn't need money — and didn't manage to get it somehow. I know my father used to say there was only one thing equal to mother's capacity for wanting things, and that was her capacity for taking them."

"Without having to steal them," suggested the doctor. "Mr. and Mrs. Quinn probably denied her very little. I take it you paid for the Gobelins? And she had no idea you were contemplating leaving the family roof?"

"We never spoke of it until after that anniversary," Alice remembered. Poor Alice, she found out the hard way that I was right — that they did hate me — and her too — and that the house wasn't big enough for us all. When her mother had her stroke, she was still so bitter at Alice that she didn't want them to send for us. . . .

"Just the same," Zoe brought out, "Teddy was in trouble you said — he needed money. And Mr. Quinn had refused to fork over. The Gobelin chair squeaked twice — maybe when she leaned forward to drop something on the coffee table — and when she leaned back. Maybe she didn't realize it would be a hard thing to cash in —"

"A shrewd business woman?" inquired the doctor. "Wouldn't she have taken the diamonds?"

"When do we begin to look for that underlying cause — those roots?" I reminded them.

"Well," said the doctor, "you gave us a pretty good picture of the way the family would look to the Man from Mars. And I think under that picture are roots and motive."

"The Profit Motive?" I couldn't resist needling him.

He ignored it. "It shouldn't be hard to figure who had the most to gain from the theft — and also possessed the character to attempt it."

"Well, not Uncle Digby!" Zoe began positively. "Although he was a chronic roulette player and always short of money —"

"But so lazy —" the doctor pointed out. "Too lazy to move when they

wanted to search under the cushions."

"Oh, but wait! Maybe he had another reason for not moving and maybe he was only *pretending* to be asleep! And if Mr. Quinn had just cut off his last source of supply —"

"Uncle Digby seemed to think in very modest terms of a ten or a twenty." The doctor accepted his third cup of black coffee. "And he never showed any desire to change his habits or enlarge his orbit. Besides, he was a habitual gambler and women aren't the only ones who consider opals unlucky."

"Well, the root was money, surely," announced Zoe. "The only trouble is, they all needed money. So the question is, who needed it most and who had the intestinal stamina to grab it."

"I always thought it was Uncle Digby," Alice confessed a little wistfully.

"You mean you always hoped it was because he meant so much less to you than — your brother perhaps?"

The doctor had her there. "You know you really thought it was Ted," I accused her and she did not deny it.

Zoe jumped to her feet, demitasse in hand. "Well, of course he's fairly obvious. That's why we saved him for the last. Even if the rest didn't realize how bad a jam he was in, he must have. You admit that, Alice."

"That was just after Bing Bailey had found out about Ted and Frieda Bailey," Alice admitted unhappily. "So Ted already knew that Bing was determined to divorce her and make him marry her. But I don't believe he realized just *how* determined Bing was. Even with the gun pressed against his ribs, I don't think he really believed that Bing would shoot. In fact he laughed —" Funny thing, family ties. He had never brought any pleasure into his sister's life and yet she could still suffer over his pain.

Zoe set down her empty cup conclusively. "Teddy is certainly the most likely one to have taken it."

"But the least likely one to have put it back," the doctor pointed out. "He knew that room and there must have been a hundred places where he could have dropped a pendant on the chance that the police would not really be called — or if they were that they wouldn't find it. Even if they did, they couldn't have pinned it on him. He had taken chances all his life. Consider him, walking up and down that room in the dark, reckless, defiant, stubborn, hating everybody and particularly his brother-in-law. He died because he laughed into a gun. I wonder whether Mr. Quinn's bluff — or even his threat — would have made him meekly replace the jewel. It's

not impossible, of course, but I just wonder . . ."

For a moment Zoe looked stumped. Then she banged her hand on the table excitedly. "Good lord! What about Abraham? Didn't you say he had just served the brandy? And he looked under the cushions, didn't he? Suppose it had dropped there and he found it and —" She looked around hopefully.

"I've known Abraham all my life," said Alice. "He always managed to save money and there was one time when we were living on Abraham's savings. We used to tease him about being thrifty, but he always said *somebody* ought to have a dollar put by, and obviously the Barroways never would. I'd stake my life on Abraham —" she finished solemnly.

"I guess he's not a very likely suspect," Zoe admitted a little shamefacedly. "In fact none of them are. That's the whole trouble. They're all possible, but not one is probable." She looked around ruefully. "I guess we haven't been much help."

"Oh, but you have!" insisted Alice, who is always gracious. "About Willette, I mean. Maybe the reason I never could break through to her was that I wasn't convinced *enough*. Now I am. And I'm very grateful — truly. The rest really doesn't matter. Ted and Mother are gone and Uncle Digby —" Her shrug dismissed him, together with the whole puzzle. But her eyes gave the gesture the lie. Poor Alice, her vines aren't easily uprooted —

"I hate to give up —" sighed Zoe.

"Why should you?" the doctor demanded. "It's a great story. You should write it."

"Without an answer? Or a villain? What could I write?"

"What Mr. Quinn understood so well and told so graphically. Six people celebrating together, presenting the appearance of a happy family circle, rich, wellborn, well-favored — in fact, the darlings of fortune. Almost casually a bauble disappears. And suddenly all the rot and corruption come to the surface — envy — sycophancy — greed — one iron will trying to break or absorb all the others — mutual mistrust — contempt — resentment — hate. But through this very eruption, the ones who are worth saving escape. And their escape contributes to the final dissolution of the others — by death — by violence — by slow decay. Why, it's an absorbing social document!"

"And Society is the villain. I see what you mean —" said Zoe. But as

she went with Alice to get their wraps, it was evident she was not satisfied.

I wasn't either. "Very clever, Dr. Marcus, but I don't think that analytical searchlight brought up anything new. I like concrete results. However, I admire the way you sidestepped it. Another brandy?"

"Thank you, Mr. Quinn. You understand, I didn't like to be too explicit before Mrs. Quinn. She is a very sensitive, very sentimental woman. Besides, I couldn't help feeling a certain sympathy for the person who took the pendant."

"Come on — don't be cryptic with me. I want to know who did it and how you figured it out. That is, if you have figured it out. And don't forget that Profit Motive."

The doctor looked into his glass of brandy. "The profit motive, of course, is all over the yarn — and it provides a lot of mixed threads which haven't anything to do with the real purpose of the theft." He held up his glass and squinted through it at the light.

"The basic problem, Mr. Quinn, was the one which the theft did solve — the problem of saving what was best from the inevitable corruption of that atmosphere. I'm glad you got her away before that house destroyed her utterly. It was clever psychology you used, to break their hold on her. And it was cleverly told too. But obviously you were the only person in the room who had a really impelling motive and the necessary character. No wonder you are a successful business man. Of course, there are people who might cavil at a certain dishonesty in your method — a certain callous disregard as to where the chips might fall. But then, that's what business is, isn't it Mr. Quinn?"

Abraham came in with our coats. "Good night, Abraham," the doctor said, "I enjoyed your dinner very much."

"Thank you, doc — I hope you-all will come again —"

I hope not. . . .

But I've been thinking I'd get a big kick out of having some kids playing around on the terrace and since we haven't got any I imagine there are a lot of rickety ones around that might like to pick up a little sun. I'm going to put a bug in Alice's ear the next time she goes down to that clinic.

One of the great figures of modern English literature, whom we never associate with any form of detective-crime fiction, is H. G. Wells. Usually we think of Wells as a world-historian, as a serious novelist, or as the creator of the most fascinating scientific romances ever written. Always on the alert for discoveries, your editors have tracked down a realistic "crook" story by Mr. Wells. And where do you think we found it? In a collection of scientific fantasies called "The Stolen Bacillus and Other Incidents," published in 1895!

THE HAMMERPOND PARK BURGLARY

by H. G. WELLS

It is a moot point whether burglary is to be considered as a sport, a trade, or an art. For a trade, the technique is scarcely rigid enough, and its claims to be considered an art are vitiated by the mercenary element that qualifies its triumphs. On the whole, it seems to be most justly ranked as sport, a sport for which no rules are at present formulated, and of which the prizes are distributed in an extremely informal manner. It was this informality of burglary that led to the regrettable extinction of two promising beginners at Hammerpond Park.

The stakes offered in this affair consisted chiefly of diamonds and other personal *bric-à-brac* belonging to the newly married Lady Aveling. Lady Aveling, as the reader will remember, was the only daughter of Mrs. Montague Pangs, the well-known hostess. Her marriage to Lord Aveling was extensively advertised in the papers, the quantity and quality of her wedding presents, and the fact that the honeymoon was to be spent at Hammerpond. The announcement of these valuable prizes created a considerable sensation in the small circle in which Mr. Teddy Watkins was the undisputed leader, and it was decided that, accompanied by a duly-qualified assistant, he should visit the village of Hammerpond in his professional capacity.

Being a man of naturally retiring and modest disposition, Mr. Watkins determined to make this visit *incog.*, and after due consideration of the conditions of his enterprise, he selected the rôle of a landscape artist, and the unassuming surname of Smith. He preceded his assistant, who, it was decided, should join him only on the last afternoon of his stay at Hammerpond. Now the village of Hammerpond is perhaps one of the prettiest little corners in Sussex; many thatched houses still survive, the flint-built church

with its tall spire nestling under the down is one of the finest and least restored in the county, and the beech-woods and bracken jungles through which the road runs to the great house are singularly rich in what the vulgar artist and photographer call "bits." So that Mr. Watkins, on his arrival with two virgin canvases, a brand-new easel, a paintbox, portmanteau, an ingenious little ladder made in sections (after the pattern of the late lamented master Charles Peace), crowbar, and wire coils, found himself welcomed with effusion and some curiosity by half-a-dozen other brethren of the brush. It rendered the disguise he had chosen unexpectedly plausible, but it inflicted upon him a considerable amount of aesthetic conversation for which he was very imperfectly prepared.

"Have you exhibited very much?" said Young Porson in the bar-parlour of the "Coach and Horses," where Mr. Watkins was skilfully accumulating local information on the night of his arrival.

"Very little," said Mr. Watkins, "just a snack here and there."

"Academy?"

"Of course. *And* at the Crystal Palace."

"Did they hang you well?" said Porson.

"Don't rot," said Mr. Watkins. "I don't like it."

"I mean did they put you in a good place?"

"Whadyer mean?" said Mr. Watkins suspiciously. "One 'ud think you were trying to make out I'd been put away."

Porson had been brought up by aunts, and was a gentlemanly young man even for an artist; he did not know what being "put away" meant, but he thought it best to explain that he intended nothing of the sort. As the question of hanging seemed a sore point with Mr. Watkins, he tried to divert the conversation a little.

"Do you do figure-work at all?"

"No, never had a head for figures," said Mr. Watkins, "my miss — Mrs. Smith, I mean, does all that."

"She paints, too!" said Porson. "That's rather jolly."

"Very," said Mr. Watkins, though he really did not think so, and, feeling the conversation was drifting a little beyond his grasp, added, "I came down here to paint Hammerpond House by moonlight."

"Really!" said Porson. "That's rather a novel idea."

"Yes," said Mr. Watkins, "I thought it rather a good notion when it occurred to me. I expect to begin to-morrow night."

"What! You don't mean to paint in the open, by night."

"I do, though."

"But how will you see your canvas?"

"Have a bloomin' cop's —" began Mr. Watkins, rising too quickly to the question, and then realising this, bawled to Miss Durgan for another glass of beer. "I'm goin' to have a thing called a dark lantern," he said to Porson.

"But it's about new moon now," objected Porson. "There won't be any moon."

"There'll be the house," said Watkins, "at any rate, I'm goin', you see to paint the house first and the moon afterwards."

"Oh!" said Porson, too staggered to continue the conversation.

"They doo say," said old Durgan, the landlord, who had maintained a respectful silence during the technical conversation, "as there's no less than three p'licemen from 'Azelworth on dewty every night in the house — 'count of this Lady Aveling 'n her jewellery. One'm won fower-and-six last night, off second footman — tossin'."

Towards sunset next day Mr. Watkins, virgin canvas, easel, and a very considerable case of other appliances in hand, strolled up the pleasant pathway through the beech-woods to Hammerpond Park, and pitched his apparatus in a strategic position commanding the house. Here he was observed by Mr. Raphael Sant, who was returning across the park from a study of the chalk-pits. His curiosity having been fired by Porson's account of the new arrival, he turned aside with the idea of discussing nocturnal art.

Mr. Watkins was apparently unaware of his approach. A friendly conversation with Lady Hammerpond's butler had just terminated, and that individual, surrounded by the three pet dogs which it was his duty to take for an airing after dinner had been served, was receding in the distance. Mr. Watkins was mixing colour with an air of great industry. Sant, approaching more nearly, was surprised to see the colour in question was as harsh and brilliant an emerald-green as it is possible to imagine. Having cultivated an extreme sensibility to colour from his earliest years, he drew the air in sharply between his teeth at the very first glimpse of this brew. Mr. Watkins turned round. He looked annoyed.

"What on earth are you going to do with that *beastly* green?" said Sant.

Mr. Watkins realised that his zeal to appear busy in the eyes of the butler had evidently betrayed him into some technical error. He hesitated.

"Pardon my rudeness," said Sant; "but really, that green is altogether

too amazing. It came as a shock. What *do* you mean to do with it?"

Mr. Watkins was collecting his resources. Nothing could save the situation but decision. "If you come here interrupting my work," he said, "I'm a-goin' to paint your face with it."

Sant retired, for he was a humorist and a peaceful man. Going down the hill he met Porson and Wainwright. "Either that man is a genius or he is a dangerous lunatic," said he. "Just go up and look at his green." And he continued his way, his countenance brightened by a pleasant anticipation of a cheerful affray round an easel in the gloaming, and the shedding of much green paint.

But to Porson and Wainwright Mr. Watkins was less aggressive, and explained that the green was intended to be the first coating of his picture. It was, he admitted in response to a remark, an absolutely new method, invented by himself. But subsequently he became more reticent; he explained he was not going to tell every passer-by the secret of his own particular style, and added some scathing remarks upon the meanness of people "hanging about" to pick up such tricks of the masters as they could, which immediately relieved him of their company.

Twilight deepened, first one, then another star appeared. The rooks amid the tall trees to the left of the house had long since lapsed into slumbrous silence, the house itself lost all the details of its architecture and became a dark grey outline, and then the windows of the salon shone out brilliantly, the conservatory was lighted up, and here and there a bedroom window burnt yellow. Had anyone approached the easel in the park it would have been found deserted. One brief, uncivil word in brilliant green sullied the purity of its canvas. Mr. Watkins was busy in the shrubbery with his assistant, who had discreetly joined him from the carriage-drive.

Mr. Watkins was inclined to be self-congratulatory upon the ingenious device by which he had carried all his apparatus boldly, and in the sight of all men, right up to the scene of operations. "That's the dressing-room," he said to his assistant, "and, as soon as the maid takes the candle away and goes down to supper, we'll call in. My! how nice the house do look, to be sure, against the starlight, and with all its windows and lights! Swopme, Jim, I almost wish I *was* a painter-chap. Have you fixed that there wire across the path from the laundry?"

He cautiously approached the house until he stood below the dressing-room window, and began to put together his folding ladder. He was much

too experienced a practitioner to feel any unusual excitement. Jim was reconnoitering the smoking-room. Suddenly, close beside Mr. Watkins in the bushes, there was a violent crash and a stifled curse. Someone had tumbled over the wire which his assistant had just arranged. He heard feet running on the gravel pathway beyond. Mr. Watkins, like all true artists, was a singularly shy man, and he incontinently dropped his folding ladder and began running circumspectly through the shrubbery. He was indistinctly aware of two people hot upon his heels, and he fancied that he distinguished the outline of his assistant in front of him. In another moment he had vaulted the low stone wall bounding the shrubbery, and was in the open park. Two thuds on the turf followed his own leap.

It was a close chase in the darkness through the trees. Mr. Watkins was a loosely-built man and in good training, and he gained hand-over-hand upon the hoarsely panting figure in front. Neither spoke, but, as Mr. Watkins pulled up alongside, a qualm of awful doubt came over him. The other man turned his head at the same moment and gave an exclamation of surprise. "It's not Jim," thought Mr. Watkins, and simultaneously the stranger flung himself, as it were, at Watkins' knees, and they were forthwith grappling on the ground together. "Lend a hand, Bill," cried the stranger as the third man came up. And Bill did — two hands, in fact, and some accentuated feet. The fourth man, presumably Jim, had apparently turned aside and made off in a different direction. At any rate, he did not join the trio.

Mr. Watkins' memory of the incidents of the next two minutes is extremely vague. He has a dim recollection of having his thumb in the corner of the mouth of the first man, and feeling anxious about its safety, and for some seconds at least he held the head of the gentleman answering to the name of Bill to the ground by the hair. He was also kicked in a great number of different places, apparently by a vast multitude of people. Then the gentleman who was not Bill got his knee below Mr. Watkins's diaphragm, and tried to curl him up upon it.

When his sensations became less entangled he was sitting upon the turf, and eight or ten men — the night was dark, and he was rather too confused to count — standing round him, apparently waiting for him to recover. He mournfully assumed that he was captured, and would probably have made some philosophical reflections on the fickleness of fortune had not his internal sensations disinclined him for speech.

He noticed very quickly that his wrists were not handcuffed, and then a flask of brandy was put in his hands. This touched him a little — it was such unexpected kindness.

"He's a-comin' round," said a voice which he fancied as belonging to the Hammerpond second footman.

"We've got 'em, sir, both of 'em," said the Hammerpond butler, the man who had handed him the flask. "Thanks to *you*."

No one answered this remark. Yet he failed to see how it applied to him.

"He's fair dazed," said a strange voice; "the villains half-murdered him."

Mr. Teddy Watkins decided to remain fair dazed until he had a better grasp of the situation. He perceived that two of the black figures round him stood side by side with a dejected air, and there was something in the carriage of their shoulders that suggested to his experienced eye hands that were bound together. Two! In a flash he rose to his position. He emptied the little flask and staggered — obsequious hands assisting him — to his feet. There was a sympathetic murmur.

"Shake hands, sir, shake hands," said one of the figures near him. "Permit me to introduce myself. I am very greatly indebted to you. It was the jewels of my wife, Lady Aveling, which attracted these scoundrels to the house."

"Very glad to make your lordship's acquaintance," said Teddy Watkins.

"I presume you saw the rascals making for the shrubbery, and dropped down on them?"

"That's exactly how it happened," said Mr. Watkins.

"You should have waited till they got in at the window," said Lord Aveling; "they would get it hotter if they had actually committed the burglary. And it was lucky for you two of the policemen were out by the gates, and followed up the three of you. I doubt if you could have secured the two of them — though it was confoundedly plucky of you."

"Yes, I ought to have thought of all that," said Mr. Watkins; "but one can't think of everything."

"Certainly not," said Lord Aveling. "I am afraid they have mauled you a little," he added. The party was now moving towards the house. "You walk rather lame. May I offer you my arm?"

And instead of entering Hammerpond House by the dressing-room window, Mr. Watkins entered it — slightly intoxicated, and inclined now to cheerfulness again — on the arm of a real live peer, and by the front door. "This," thought Mr. Watkins, "is burgling in style!" The "scoundrels,"

seen by the gaslight, proved to be mere local amateurs unknown to Mr. Watkins, and they were taken down into the pantry and there watched over by the three policemen, two gamekeepers with loaded guns, the butler, an ostler, and a carman, until the dawn allowed of their removal to Hazelhurst police station. Mr. Watkins was made much of in the salon. They devoted a sofa to him, and would not hear of a return to the village that night. Lady Aveling was sure he was brilliantly original, and said her idea of Turner was just such another rough, half-inebriated, deep-eyed, brave, and clever man. Someone brought up a remarkable little folding ladder that had been picked up in the shrubbery, and showed him how it was put together. They also described how wires had been found in the shrubbery, evidently placed there to trip up unwary pursuers. It was lucky he had escaped these snares. And they showed him the jewels.

Mr. Watkins had the sense not to talk too much, and in any conversational difficulty fell back on his internal pains. At last he was seized with stiffness in the back, and yawning. Everyone suddenly awoke to the fact that it was a shame to keep him talking after his affray, so he retired early to his room, the little red room next to Lord Aveling's suite.

. . . . .

The dawn found a deserted easel bearing a canvas with a green inscription, in the Hammerpond Park, and it found Hammerpond House in commotion. But if the dawn found Mr. Teddy Watkins and the Aveling diamonds, it did not communicate the information to the police.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933

of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, published bimonthly at Concord, N. H., for October 1, 1942

State of New York, County of New York, ss. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Joseph W. Ferman, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are: *Publisher*, Lawrence E. Spivak, 570 Lexington Ave., New York; *Editor*, Ellery Queen, 570 Lexington Ave., New York; *Managing Editor*, Mildred Falk, 570 Lexington Ave., New York; *Business Manager*, Joseph W. Ferman, 570 Lexington Ave., New York.

2. That the owners are: The American Mercury, Inc.; Lawrence E. Spivak, 570 Lexington Ave., N. Y.; Joseph W. Ferman, 570 Lexington Ave., N. Y.; Eugene Lyons, 570 Lexington Ave., N. Y.; Mildred Falk, 570 Lexington Ave., N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

J. W. Ferman, *Business Manager.*

Sworn to and subscribed before me, this 22nd day of September, 1942.

[Seal] Gertrude J. Huebner, *Notary Public.*
(My commission expires March 30, 1944.)

We didn't think it fair to include in this issue (as we have) a parody of Dorothy L. Sayers without giving you a story by Miss Sayers herself. So here is "The Leopard Lady," of which we will say merely this: Read the first three pages. If then you can put the story down, you are suffering from hardening of the imagination.

THE LEOPARD LADY

by DOROTHY L. SAYERS

"If the boy is in your way," said a voice in Tressider's ear, "ask at Rapallo's for Smith & Smith."

Tressider started and looked round. There was nobody near him — unless you counted the bookstall clerk, and the aged gentleman with crooked pince-nez halfway down his nose, who stood poring over a copy of *Blackwood*. Obviously, neither of these two could have uttered that sinister whisper. A yard or two away stood a porter, wearily explaining to a militant woman and a dejected little man that the 5.30 having now gone there was no other train before 9.15. All three were utter strangers to Tressider. He shook himself. It must have been his own subconscious wish that had externalised itself in this curious form. He must keep a hold on himself. Hidden wishes that took shape as audible promptings and whisperings were apt to lead to Colney Hatch — or Broadmoor.

But what in the world had suggested the names "Rapallo's" and "Smith & Smith"? Rapallo — that was a town in Italy or somewhere, he fancied. But the word had come to him as "Rapallo's," as though it were the name of a firm or a person. And "Smith & Smith," too. Fantastic. Then he glanced up at the bookstall. Of course, yes — "W. H. Smith & Son"; that must have been the point from which the suggestion had started, and his repressed desires had somehow pushed their message past his censor in that preposterous sentence.

"If the boy is in your way, ask at Rapallo's for Smith & Smith."

He let his eye wander over the books and magazines spread out on the stall. Was there anything — yes, there was. A pile of little red books, of which the topmost bore the title: "How to ask for What you Want in ITALY." There was the other factor of the equation. "Italy" had been the

match laid to the train, and the resulting spark had been, queerly but understandably enough, "Rapallo's."

Satisfied, he handed a shilling across the stall and asked for the *Strand Magazine*. He tucked his purchase under his arm and then, glancing at the station clock, decided that he had just time for a quick one before his train went. He turned into the buffet, pausing on the way to buy a packet of cigarettes at the kiosk, where the militant woman was already arming herself with milk-chocolate against her wait for the 9.15. He noticed, with a certain grim satisfaction, that the dejected man had made his escape, and was not altogether surprised to encounter him again in the buffet, hurriedly absorbing something yellow out of a glass.

He was some little time getting served, for there was quite a crowd about the bar. But even if he did miss his train, there was another in twenty minutes' time, and his odd experience had shaken him. The old gentleman with *Blackwood's* had drifted up to the door by the time he left, and, indeed, nearly collided with Tressider in his shortsighted progress. Tressider absently apologised for what was not his fault, and made for the barrier. Here there was again a trifling delay while he searched for his ticket, and a porter who stood beside him with some hand-luggage eventually lost patience and pushed past him with a brief, "By your leave, sir." Eventually, however, he found himself in a first-class carriage with four minutes to spare.

He threw his hat up on the rack and himself into a corner seat, and immediately, with an automatic anxiety to banish his own thoughts, opened his magazine. As he did so, a card fluttered from between the leaves on to his knee. With an exclamation of impatience directed against the advertisers who filled the pages of magazines with insets, he picked it up, intending to throw it under the seat. A line of black capitals caught his eyes:

SMITH & SMITH

and beneath, in smaller type:

REMOVALS

He turned the card over. It was about the size of an "At Home" card. The other side was completely blank. There was no address; no explanation. An impulse seized him. He snatched up his hat and made for the door. The train was moving as he sprang out, and he staggered as his feet touched the platform. A porter sprang to his side with a warning shout.

"Shouldn't do that, sir," said the man, reprovingly.

"All right, all right," said Tressider, "I've left something behind."

"That's dangerous, that is," said the porter. "Against regulations."

"Oh, all *right*," said Tressider, fumbling for a coin. As he handed it over, he recognised the porter as the man who had jostled him at the barrier and had stood behind him at the bookstall talking to the militant woman and the dejected man. He dismissed the man hastily, feeling unaccountably uneasy under his official eye. He ran past the barrier with a hasty word to the ticket collector who still stood there, and made his way back to the bookstall.

"*Strand Magazine*," he demanded, curtly, and then, thinking he caught an astonished expression in the eye of the clerk, he muttered:

"Dropped the other."

The clerk said nothing, but handed over the magazine and accepted Tressider's shilling. Only when he was turning away did Tressider realise that he was still clutching the original copy of the *Strand* under his arm. Well, let the man think what he liked.

Unable to wait, he dived into the General Waiting Room and shook the new *Strand* open. Several insets flew out — one about learning new languages by gramophone, one about Insurance, one about Hire Purchase Payments. He gathered them up and tossed them aside again. Then he examined the magazine, page by page. There was no white card with the name "Smith & Smith."

He stood, trembling, in the dusty gas-light of the waiting-room. Had he imagined the card? Was his brain playing tricks with him again? He could not remember what he had done with the card. He searched both magazines and all his pockets. It was not there. He must have left it in the train.

He *must* have left it in the train.

Sweat broke out upon his forehead. It was a terrible thing to go mad. If he had not seen that card — but he *had* seen it. He could see the shape and spacing of the black capitals distinctly.

After a moment or two, an idea came to him. A firm that advertised itself must have an address, perhaps a telephone number. But, of course, not necessarily in London. Those magazines went all over the world. What was the good of advertising without a name or address? Still, he would look. The words "Smith & Smith, Removals," in the London Telephone Directory would steady his nerves considerably.

He went out and sought the nearest telephone cabinet. The directory

hung there on its stout chain. Only when he opened it did he realise how many hundred firms called "Smith & Smith" there might be in London. The small print made his eyes ache, but he persevered, and was at length rewarded by finding an entry: "Smith & Smith, Frntre Removrs & Haulage Cntrctrs," with an address in Greenwich.

That should have satisfied him, but it did not. He could not believe that a firm of Furniture Removers and Haulage Contractors at Greenwich would advertise, without address, in a magazine of world-wide circulation. Only firms whose name was a household word could do that kind of thing. And besides, in that second *Strand* there had been no advertisement.

Then how had the card got there? Had the bookstall clerk slipped it in? Or the militant woman who had stood beside him at the tobacco kiosk? Or the dejected man sipping whisky and soda in the buffet? Or the old gentleman who had passed him in the entrance? Or the porter who had waited behind him at the barrier? It came suddenly into his mind that all these five had been near him when he had heard the voice of his repressed wish whisper so persuasively, and so objectively:

"If the boy is in your way, ask at Rapallo's for Smith & Smith."

With a kind of greedy reluctance, he turned the pages of the Telephone Directory backwards to R.

There it was. There could be no mistake about it this time.

"Rapallo's Sandwich & Cocktail Bar,"

with an address in Conduit Street.

A minute later, Tressider was hailing a taxi outside the station. His wife would be expecting him, but she must wait. He had often been detained in town before. He gave the taxi the Conduit Street address.

It was a small place, but had nothing sinister about it. Clean, white-draped tables with individual lights and a big mahogany bar, whose wide semi-circle took up nearly half the available floor-space. The door closed behind Tressider with a comfortable, chuckling click. He went up to the bar and, with an indescribable fluttering of the heart, said to the white-coated attendant:

"I was told to ask here for Messrs. Smith & Smith."

"What name, sir?" asked the man, showing neither hesitation nor surprise.

"Jones," said Tressider, uninventively.

"Maurice, have we any message for a Mr. Jones from — whom did you say, sir? Oh, yes. From Messrs. Smith & Smith?"

The second barman turned round and enveloped Tressider in a brief, searching glance.

"Oh, yes," he said. "Quite right, sir. Mr. Smith is expecting you. Will you step this way."

He led Tressider to the back of the room, where a stoutish, middle-aged man in a dark tweed suit was seated at a table eating an American sandwich.

"Mr. Jones, sir."

The stout man looked up, revealing small, chubby features beneath an enormous expanse of polished and dome-like skull. He smiled pleasantly.

"You are magnificently punctual," he said, in a clear, soft voice, with a fluting quality which made it very delightful to listen to. "I hardly expected you to get here quite so soon." And then, as the barman turned away, he added:

"Pray sit down, Mr. Tressider."

"You look a little unnerved," said Mr. Smith. "Perhaps you had a rush from the station. Let me recommend one of Rapallo's special cocktails." He made a sign to the barman, who brought over two glasses filled with a curious, dark-coloured liqueur. "You will find it slightly bitter, but very effective. You need not be alarmed, by the way. Choose whichever glass you like and leave me the other. It is quite immaterial which."

Tressider, a little confounded by the smiling ease with which Mr. Smith read his thoughts, took one of the glasses at random. Mr. Smith immediately took the other and drank off one-half of the contents. Tressider sipped his. The liqueur was certainly bitter but not altogether unpleasant.

"It will do you good," said Mr. Smith, prosaically. "The boy, I take it, is quite well?" he went on, almost in the same breath.

"Perfectly well," said Tressider, staring.

"Of course. Your wife takes such good care of him, doesn't she? A thoroughly good and conscientious woman, as most women are, bless their dear hearts. The child is six years old, I think?"

"Rising six."

"Just so. A long time to go yet before he attains his majority. Fifteen years — yes, a considerable time, in which very many things may happen.

You yourself, for instance, will be hard on sixty — the best part of your life at an end, while his is just beginning. He is a young gentleman of great expectations, to quote the divine Dickens. And he is starting well, despite the sad handicap of losing both his parents at so early an age. A fine, healthy youngster, is he not? No measles? mumps? whooping-cough? that sort of thing?"

"Not so far," muttered Tressider.

"No. Your almost-parental care has shielded him from all the ills that youthful flesh is heir to. How wise your brother was, Mr. Tressider. Some people might have thought it foolish of him to leave Cyril in your sole guardianship, considering that there was only his little life between you and the Tressider estate. Foolish — and even inconsiderate. For, after all, it is a great responsibility, is it not? A child seems to hold its life by so frail a tenure. But your brother was a wise man, after all. Knowing your upright, virtuous wife and yourself so well, he did the best thing he could possibly have done for Cyril when he left him in your care. Eh?"

"Of course," said Tressider, thickly.

Mr. Smith finished his liqueur.

"You are not drinking," he protested.

"Look here," said Tressider, gulping down the remainder of his drink, "you seem to know a lot about me and my affairs."

"Oh, but that is common knowledge, surely. The doings of so rich and fortunate a little boy as Cyril Tressider are chronicled in every newspaper paragraph. Perhaps the newspapers do not know quite so much about Mr. Tressider, his uncle and guardian. They may not realise quite how deeply he was involved in the Megatherium catastrophe, nor how much he has lost in one way and another on the turf. Still, they know, naturally, that he is an upright English gentleman and that both he and his wife are devoted to the boy."

Tressider leaned his elbow on the table and, holding his head propped on his hand, tried to read Mr. Smith's countenance. He found it difficult, for Mr. Smith and the room and everything about him seemed to advance and recede in the oddest manner. He thought he might be in for a dose of fever.

"Children . . ." Mr. Smith's voice fluted towards him from an enormous distance. "Accidents, naturally, will sometimes happen. No one can prevent it. Childish ailments may leave distressing after effects . . . baby-

ish habits, however judiciously checked, may lead . . . Pardon me, I fear you are not feeling altogether the thing."

"I feel damned queer," said Tressider. "I — at the station today — hallucinations — I can't understand —"

Suddenly, from the pit in which it had lurked, chained and growling, Terror leapt at him. It shook his bones and cramped his stomach. It was like a palpable enemy, suffocating and tearing him. He gripped the table. He saw Mr. Smith's huge face loom down upon him, immense, immeasurable.

"Dear, dear!" The voice boomed in his ear like a great silver bell. "You are really not well. Allow me. Just a sip of this."

He drank, and the Terror, defeated, withdrew from him. A vast peace surged over his brain. He laughed. Everything was jolly, jolly, jolly. He wanted to sing.

Mr. Smith beckoned to the barman.

"Is the car ready?" he asked.

Tressider stood by Mr. Smith's side. The car had gone, and they were alone before the tall green gates that towered into the summer twilight. Mile upon mile they had driven through town and country; mile upon mile, with the river rolling beside them and the scent of trees and water blown in upon the July breeze. They had been many hours upon the journey, and yet the soft dusk was hardly deeper than when they had set out. For them, as for Joshua, sun and stars had stood still in their courses. That this was so, Tressider knew, for he was not drunk or dreaming. His senses had never been more acute, his perceptions more vivid. Every leaf upon the tall poplars that shivered above the gates was vivid to him with a particular beauty of sound, shape and odour. The gates, which bore in great letters the name "SMITH & SMITH — REMOVALS," opened at Smith's touch. The long avenue of poplars stretched up to a squat grey house with a pillared portico.

Many times in the weeks that followed, Tressider asked himself whether he had after all dreamed that strange adventure at the House of the Poplars. From the first whisper by the station bookstall to the journey by car down to his own home in Essex, every episode had had a nightmare quality. Yet surely, no nightmare had ever been so consecutive nor so clearly memorable

in waking moments. There was the room with its pale grey walls and shining floor — a luminous pool in the soft mingling of electric light and dying daylight from the high, unshuttered windows. There were the four men — Mr. Smith, of the restaurant; Mr. Smyth, with his narrow yellow face disfigured by a scar like an acid burn; Mr. Smythe, square and sullen, with short, strong hands and hairy knuckles; and Dr. Schmidt, the giggling man with the scanty red beard and steel-rimmed spectacles. And there was the girl with the slanting golden eyes like a cat's, he thought. They called her "Miss Smith," but her name should have been Melusine.

Nor could he have dreamed the conversation, which was businesslike and brief.

"It has long been evident to us," said Mr. Smith, "that society is in need of a suitable organisation for the Removal of unnecessary persons. Private and amateur attempts at Removal are so frequently attended with subsequent inconvenience and even danger to the Remover, who, in addition, usually has to carry out his work with very makeshift materials. It is our pleasure and privilege to attend to all the disagreeable details of such Removals for our clients at a moderate — I may say, a merely nominal — expense. Provided our terms are strictly adhered to, we can guarantee our clients against all unpleasant repercussions, preserving, of course, inviolable secrecy as to the whole transaction."

Dr. Schmidt sniggered faintly.

"In the matter of young Cyril Tressider, for example," went on Mr. Smith, "I can conceive nothing more unnecessary than the existence of this wearisome child. He is an orphan; his only relations are Mr. and Mrs. Tressider who, however amiably disposed they may feel towards the boy, are financially embarrassed by his presence in the world. If he were to be quietly Removed, who would be the loser? Not himself, since he would be spared the sins and troubles of life on this ill-regulated planet; not his relations, for he has none but his uncle and aunt who would be better for his disappearance; not his tenants and dependents, since his good uncle would be there to take his place. I suggest, Mr. Tressider, that the small sum of one thousand pounds would be profitably spent in Removing this boy to that happy land 'far, far beyond the stars,' where he might play with the young-eyed cherubim (to quote our glorious poet), remote from the accidents of measles or stomach-ache to which, alas! all young children are so unhappily liable here below."

"A thousand?" said Tressider, and laughed, "I would give five, gladly, to be rid of the youngster."

Dr. Schmidt sniggered. "We should not like to be rapacious," he said. "No. One thousand pounds will amply repay the very trifling trouble."

"How about the risk?" said Tressider.

"We have abolished risk," replied Mr. Smith. "For us, and for our clients, the word does not exist. Tell me, the boy resides with you at your home in Essex? Yes. Is he a good little boy?"

"Decent enough kid, as far as that goes."

"No bad habits?"

"He's a bit of a liar, like lots of kids."

"How so, my friend?" asked Dr. Schmidt.

"He romances. Pretends he's had all kinds of adventures with giants and fairies and tigers and what not. You know the kind of thing. Doesn't seem to be able to tell the truth. It worries his aunt a good deal."

"Ah!" Dr. Schmidt seemed to take over the interview at this point. "The good Mrs. Tressider, she does not encourage the romancing?"

"No. She does her best. Tells Cyril that he'll go to a bad place if he tells stories. But it's wonderful how the little beggar persists. Sometimes we have to spank him. But he's damnably obstinate. There's a bad streak in the boy somewhere. Unsound. Not English, that sort of thing."

"Sad," said Dr. Schmidt, sniggering, so that the word became a long bleat. "Sa-a-d. It would be a pity if the poor little boy should miss the golden gates after all. That would distress me."

"It would be still more distressing, Schmidt, that a person with a failing of that kind should be placed in any position of importance as the owner of the Tressider estates. Honour and uprightness, coupled with a healthy lack of imagination, have made this country what it is."

"True," said Dr. Schmidt. "How beautifully you put it, my dear Smith. No doubt, Mr. Tressider, your little ward finds much scope for imaginative adventure when playing about in the deserted grounds of Crantonbury Place, situated so conveniently next door to your abode."

"You seem to know a lot," said Tressider.

"Our organisation," explained Dr. Schmidt, with a wave of the hand. "It is melancholy to see these fine old country mansions thus deserted, but one man's loss is the gain of the little boy next door. I should encourage little Cyril to play in the grounds of Crantonbury Hall. His little limbs will

grow strong running about among the over-grown bushes and the straggling garden-beds where the strawberry grows underneath the nettle. I quote your Shakespeare, my dear Smith. It is a calamity that the fountains should be silent and the great fish-pond run dry. The nine men's morris is filled up with mud — Shakespeare again. Nevertheless, there are still many possibilities in an old garden."

He giggled and pulled at his thin beard.

If this fantastic conversation had never taken place, how was it that Tressider could remember every word so clearly. He remembered, too, signing a paper — the "Removal Order," Smith had called it — and a cheque for £1,000, payable to Smith & Smith, and post-dated October 1st.

"We like to allow a margin," said Mr. Smith. "We cannot at this moment predict to a day when the Removal will be carried out. But from now to October 1st should provide ample time. If you should change your mind before the Removal has taken place, you have only to leave word to that effect at Rappallo's. But *after* the Removal, it would be too late to make any alterations. Indeed, in such a case, there might be — er — unpleasantness of a kind which I should not care to specify. But, between gentlemen, such a situation could not, naturally, arise. Are you likely to be absent from home at any time in the near future?"

Tressider shook his head.

"No? Forgive me, but I think you would be well advised to spend — let us say the month of September — abroad. Or perhaps in Scotland. There is salmon, there is trout, there is grouse, there is partridge — all agreeable creatures to kill."

Dr. Schmidt sniggered again.

"Just as you like, of course," went on Mr. Smith. "But if you and perhaps your wife also —"

"My wife wouldn't leave Cyril."

"Yourself, then. A holiday from domesticity is sometimes an excellent thing."

"I will think about it," said Tressider.

He had thought often about it. He also thought frequently about the blank counterfoil in his cheque-book. That, at least, was a fact. He was

thinking about it in Scotland on September 15th, as he tramped across the moors, gun on shoulder. It might be a good thing to stop that cheque.

"Auntie Edith!"

"Yes, Cyril."

Mrs. Tressider was a thin woman with a strong, Puritan face; a woman of narrow but fixed affections and limited outlook.

"Auntie, I've had a wonderful adventure."

Mrs. Tressider pressed her pale lips together.

"Now, Cyril, think beforehand. Don't exaggerate, dear. You look very hot and excited."

"Yes, Auntie. I met a fairy —"

"Cyril!"

"No, *really*, Auntie, I did. She lives in Crantonbury Hall — in the old grotto. A real, live fairy. And she was all dressed in gold and lovely colours like a rainbow, red and green and blue and yellow and *all* sorts of colours. And a gold crown on her head and stars in her hair. And I wasn't a bit frightened, Auntie, and she said —"

"Cyril, dear —"

"Yes, Auntie, *really*. I'm not 'zaggerating. She was ever so beautiful. And she said I was a brave boy, just like Jack-and-the-Beanstalk, and I was to marry her when I grew up, and live in Fairyland. Only I'm not big enough yet. And she had lions and tigers and leopards all round her with gold collars and diamonds on them. And she took me into her fairy palace —"

"Cyril!"

"And we ate fairy fruit off gold plates and she's going to teach me the language of birds and give me a pair of seven-league boots all for myself, so that I can go *all* over the world and be a hero."

"That's a very exciting story you've made up, darling, but of course it's only a story, isn't it?"

"No, '*tisn't* only a story. It's quite true. You see if it isn't."

"Darling, there couldn't be lions and tigers and leopards at Crantonbury Hall."

"Well . . ." the child paused. "Well, p'r'aps I was 'zaggerating just a teeny, weeny bit. But there was two leopards."

"Oh, Cyril! Two leopards?"

"Yes, with golden collars and chains. And the fairy was ever so tall and

beautiful, with lovely goldeny eyes just like the leopards'. She said she was the fairy of the leopards, and they were fairies too, and after we'd had the fairy feast the leopards grew wings and she got on their backs — on one of them's backs I mean — and flew *right* away over the roof."

Mrs. Tressider sighed.

"I don't think Nannie ought to tell you so many fairy-tales. You know there aren't any fairies, really."

"That's all *you* know about it," said Cyril, rather rudely. "There is fairies, and I've seen one, and I'm to be the King of the Fairies when I'm bigger."

"You mustn't contradict me like that, Cyril. And it's *very naughty* to say what isn't true."

"But it *is* true, Auntie."

"You mustn't say that, darling. I've told you ever so many times that it's very nice to make up stories, but we mustn't ever forget that it's all make-believe."

"But I *did* see the fairy."

"If you say that any more, Auntie will be very cross with you —"

"But I did, I did. I *swear* I did."

"Cyril!" Mrs. Tressider was definitely shocked. "That is a very wicked word to use. You must go straight to bed without your supper, and Auntie doesn't want to see you again till you have apologised for being so rude and telling such naughty stories."

"But, Auntie —"

"That will do," said Mrs. Tressider, and rang the bell. Cyril was led away in tears.

"If you please, ma'am," said Nannie, catching Mrs. Tressider as she rose from the dinner-table, "Master Cyril doesn't seem very well, ma'am. He says he has a bad stomach-ache."

Cyril did seem feverish and queer when his aunt went up to him. He was flushed and feverish, and his eyes were unnaturally bright and frightened. He complained of a dreadful pain under his pyjama-girdle.

"That's what happens to naughty little boys who tell stories," said Mrs. Tressider, who had old-fashioned ideas about improving the occasion. "Now Nannie will have to give you some nasty medicine."

Nannie, advancing, armed with a horrid tumblerful of greeny-grey

liquorice powder, had her own moral to draw.

"I expect you've been eating them nasty old crabapples out of the old garden," she remarked. "I'm sure I've told you time and again, Master Cyril, to leave them things alone."

"I didn't eat nothing," said Cyril, "'cept the fairy feast in the palace with the leopard lady."

"We don't want to hear about the leopard lady any more," said Mrs. Tressider. "Now, own up, darling, that was all imagination and nonsense, wasn't it? He does look feverish," she added in an aside to Nancy. "Perhaps we'd better send for Dr. Simmonds. With Mr. Tressider away, one feels rather anxious. Now, Cyril, drink up your medicine and say you're sorry. . . ."

When Dr. Simmonds arrived an hour later (for he had been out when summoned) he found his patient delirious and Mrs. Tressider thoroughly alarmed. Dr. Simmonds wasted no time with liquorice powder, but used the stomach-pump. His face was grave.

"What has he been eating?" he asked, and shook his head at Nannie's suggestion of green apples. Mrs. Tressider, white and anxious, went into details about the child's story of the leopard lady.

"He looked feverish when he came in," she said, "but I thought he was just excited with his make-believe games."

"Imaginative children are often unable to distinguish between fact and fancy," said the doctor. "I think he very probably did eat something that he shouldn't have done; it would be all part of the game he was playing with himself."

"I made him confess in the end that he was making it all up," said Mrs. Tressider.

"H'm," said Dr. Simmonds. "Well, I don't think you'd better worry him about it any more. He's a highly-strung child, and he'll need all his strength —"

"You don't mean he's in any danger, Doctor?"

"Oh, I hope not, I hope not. But children are rather kittle little cattle and something has upset him badly. Is Mr. Tressider at home?"

"Ought I to send for him?"

"It might be as well. By the way, could you let me have a clean bottle? I should like to take away some of the contents of the stomach for examination. Just to be on the safe side, you know. I don't want to alarm you — it's

just that, in a case of this kind, it is as well to know what one has to deal with."

Before morning, Cyril was collapsed, blue in the face and cold, and another doctor had been called in. Tressider, when he hurriedly arrived by the midnight train, was greeted by the news that there was very little hope.

"I am afraid, Mr. Tressider, that the boy has managed to pick up something poisonous. We are having an analysis made. The symptoms are suggestive of poisoning by solanine, or some alkali of that group. Nightshade — is there any garden nightshade at Crantonbury Hall?" Thus Dr. Pratt, a specialist and expensive.

Mr. Tressider did not know, but he said he thought they might go and see next day. The search-party was accordingly sent out in the morning. They discovered no nightshade, but Dr. Pratt, prowling about the weed-grown kitchen garden, made a discovery.

"Look!" he said. "These old potato-plants have got potato-apples on them. The potato belongs to the genus Solanum, and the apples, and sometimes even the tubers themselves, have occasionally given rise to poisonous symptoms. If the boy had happened to pluck and eat some of these berries —"

"He did, then," said Dr. Simmonds. "See here."

He lifted a plant on which a number of short stalks still remained to show where the potato-apples had been.

"I had no idea," said Tressider, "that the things were as poisonous as that."

"They are not as a rule," said Dr. Pratt. "But here and there one finds a plant which is particularly rich in the poisonous principle, solanine. There was a classical case, in 1885 or thereabouts —"

He prosed on. Mrs. Tressider could not bear it. She left them and went upstairs to sit by Cyril's bedside.

"I want to see the lovely leopard lady," said Cyril, faintly.

"Yes, yes — she's coming, darling," said Mrs. Tressider.

"With her leopards?"

"Yes, darling. And lions and tigers."

"Because I've got to be King of the Fairies when I grow up."

"Of course you have, darling."

On the third day, Cyril died.

The expert's analysis confirmed Dr. Pratt's diagnosis. Seeds and skin of the potato-apple had been identified in the contents of the stomach. Death was from solanine poisoning, a remarkable quantity of the alkali having been present in the potato-apples. An examination of other berries taken from the same plants showed that the potatoes in question were, undoubtedly, particularly rich in solanine. Verdict: Death by misadventure. Children, said the coroner, were very apt to chew and eat strange plants and berries, and the potato-apple undoubtedly had an attractive appearance — like a little green tomato — the jury had no doubt often seen it in their own gardens. It was, however, very seldom that the effects were so tragic as in the present sad case. No blame could possibly attach to Mr. and Mrs. Tressider, who had repeatedly warned the child not to eat anything he did not know the name of, and had usually found him an obedient child in this respect.

Tressider, to whom nobody had thought to mention the story of the leopard lady, showed a becoming grief at the death of his little ward. He purchased a handsome suit of black and ordered a new saloon car. In this he went about a good deal by himself in the days that followed the inquest, driving, on one occasion, as far as Greenwich.

He had looked up the address in the telephone-book and presently found himself rolling down a quiet riverside lane. Yes — there they were, on the right — two shabby green gates across which, in faded white lettering, ran the words:

SMITH & SMITH
REMOVALS

He got out of the car and stood, hesitating a little. The autumn had come early that year, and as he stood, a yellow poplar leaf, shaken from its hold by the wind, fluttered delicately to his feet.

He pushed at the gates, which opened slowly, with a rusty creaking. There was no avenue of poplars and no squat grey house with a pillared portico. An untidy yard met his gaze. At the back was a tumble-down warehouse, and on either side of the gate a sickly poplar whispered fretfully. A ruddy-faced man, engaged in harnessing a cart-horse to an open lorry, came forward to greet him.

"Could I speak to Mr. Smith?" asked Tressider.

"It's Mr. Benton you'll be wanting," replied the man. "There ain't no Mr. Smith."

"Oh!" said Tressider. "Then which of the gentlemen is it that has a very high, bald forehead — a rather stoutish gentleman. I thought —"

"Nobody like that here," said the man. "You've made a mistake, mister. There's only Mr. Benton — he's tall, with grey 'air and specs, and Mr. Tinworth, the young gentleman, him that's a bit lame. Was you wanting a Removal by any chance?"

"No, no," said Tressider, rather hastily. "I thought I knew Mr. Smith, that's all. Has he retired lately?"

"Lord, no." The man laughed heartily. "There ain't been a Mr. Smith here, not in donkey's years. Come to think of it, they're all dead, I believe. Jim! What's happened to old Mr. Smith and his brother what used to run this show?"

A little elderly man came out of the warehouse, wiping his hands on his apron.

"Dead these ten years," he said. "What's up?"

"Gent here thought he knowed the parties."

"Well, they're dead," repeated Jim.

"Thank you," said Tressider.

He went back to the car. For the hundredth time he asked himself whether he should stop the cheque. The death of Cyril could only be a coincidence. It was now or never, for this was the 30th September.

He vacillated, and put the matter off till next day. At ten o'clock in the morning he rang up the bank.

"A cheque" — he gave the number — "for £1,000, payable to Smith & Smith. Has it been cashed?"

"Yes, Mr. Tressider. Nine-thirty this morning. Hope there's nothing wrong about it."

"Nothing whatever, thanks. I just wanted to know."

Then he *had* drawn it. And somebody had cashed it.

Next day there was a letter. It was typewritten and bore no address of origin; only the printed heading SMITH & SMITH and the date, 1 October.

DEAR SIR, —

With reference to your esteemed order of the 12th July for a Removal from your residence in Essex, we trust that this commission has been carried out to your satisfaction. We

beg to acknowledge your obliging favour of One Thousand Pounds (£1,000), and return herewith the Order of Removal which you were good enough to hand to us. Assuring you of our best attention at all times,

Faithfully yours,

SMITH & SMITH.

The enclosure ran as follows:

I, Arthur Tressider of (here followed his address in Essex) hereby confess that I murdered my ward and nephew, Cyril Tressider, in the following manner. Knowing that the child was in the habit of playing in the garden of Crantonbury Hall, adjoining my own residence, and vacant for the last twelve months, I searched this garden carefully and discovered there a number of old potato-plants, some of them bearing potato-apples. Into these potato-apples I injected with a small syringe a powerful solution of the poisonous alkali solanine, of which a certain quantity is always present in these plants. I prepared this solution from plants of solanum which I had already secretly gathered. I had no difficulty in doing this, having paid some attention as a young man to the study of chemistry. I felt sure that the child would be tempted to eat these berries, but had he failed to do so I had various other schemes of a similar nature in reserve, on which I should have fallen back if necessary. I committed this abominable crime in order to secure the Tressider estates, entailed upon me as next heir. I now make this confession, being troubled in my conscience.

ARTHUR TRESSIDER.

1 October, 193–

The sweat stood on Tressider's forehead.

"How did they know I had studied chemistry?"

He seemed to hear the sniggering voice of Dr. Schmidt: "Our organization —"

He burned the papers and went out without saying his customary farewell to his wife. It was not until some time later that he heard the story of the leopard lady, and he thought of Miss Smith, the girl with the yellow eyes like cat's eyes, who should have been called Melusine.

MINUTE MYSTERIES *by Roy Post and Austin Ripley*

The Case of the Trifling Detail

"It is utterly impossible to overstate the importance of *trifles* in criminal investigation," Professor Fordney told his class in criminology at the University. "Were it not for *trifles* the world would be crime-ridden to a degree appalling to contemplate. Most criminals do not make mistakes in the *important* phases of their endeavors; it is the *trifle* that trips. Hence you lads must learn to examine critically *everything* that comes under your observation. Let's see what you can do with a trifle.

"The following," Fordney continued, "is an excerpt from a statement made to Inspector Kelley, by Mrs. Ruth Cramer, who lives in a modest little six-room, detached, two-story house.

> "It was 1:15. We were in bed. The doorbell rang. Gerald went downstairs to answer it. I was nervous for some reason and followed. He switched on the living room light and unlocked the front door. A man in a telegraph messenger's uniform pushed open the screen door, stepped into the room and said, 'You Gerald Cramer, the labor man?' My husband said he was. Then the man whipped out a gun and shot Gerald twice. The sounds of the shots were little 'pops' — not big noises. Then he ran out and jumped in a car. No, I don't know whether his uniform was Postal or Western Union."

"Now then," smiled the Professor, "what is wrong with that statement? It is merely a trifle and in this instance wholly unimportant, but you must *learn* to observe *trifles*. Quickly now!"

What trifling error is in the statement?

Solution

Mrs. Cramer said the killer "PUSHED open the screen door, stepped into the room. . . ." How do you open your screen door from the outside? Pull it, don't you?

The Case of the Missing Knife

"Lads," said Professor Fordney to his criminology class, "I want you to meet conductor Thomas Braden whom I've persuaded to come along and tell you of the singular homicide on his train Tuesday night."

The class greeted Braden cordially. He began:

"Shortly after we left Hudson the woman in lower 12, car 26, let out a chilling scream. I was standing at one end of the car; Harvey, the porter, the brakeman and a Mr. Baldoni, a circus performer who boarded the train at Hudson, at the other end.

"We all met at the berth where its occupant, Maria Constanza (professional hypnotist, as we later learned), was dying from a knife wound in the heart.

"I put guards on both car doors immediately, also on doors to the empty lavatories. Every berth but one — upper 9 — was occupied. The passengers were milling about excitedly as I started search for the murder knife.

"Every passenger in car 26 — even the brakeman and porter were thoroughly searched. Every piece of baggage was minutely inspected. Window sills were covered with fresh snow and none had been opened. No one had left the car after the scream and none had entered it, nor had anyone gone in or out of either washroom, yet the knife could not be found!

"It *had* to be in car 26, but where? Finally old Henry, the porter, had the solution.

"I don't suppose," concluded Braden, "that you fellows will have much difficulty in deducing where the knife was found."

Where was the knife found?

Solution

The knife was found in the conductor's pocket — where the murderer had put it!

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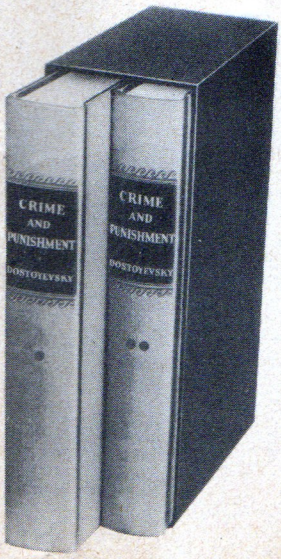

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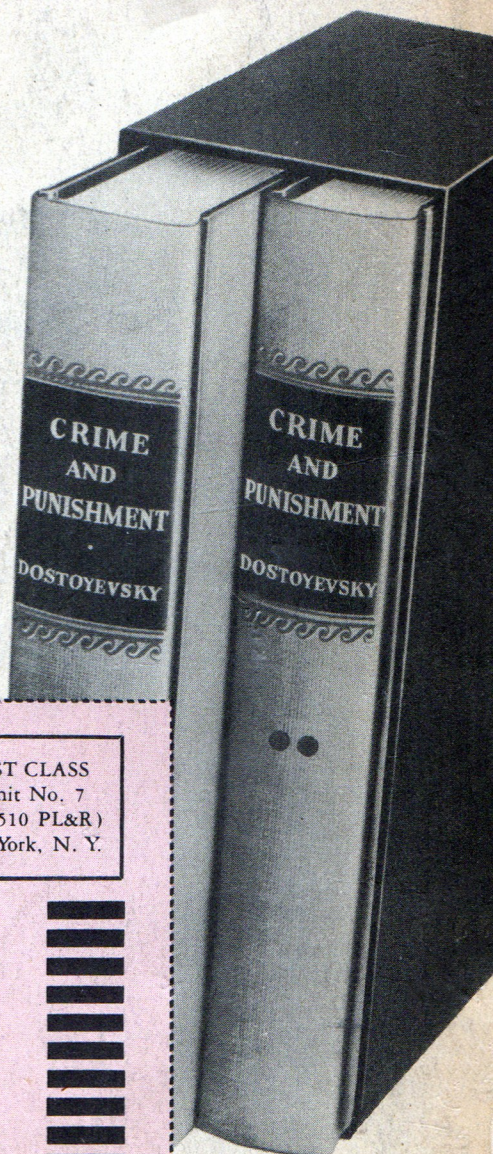

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